

Battlefield Emotions in Late Antiquity

History of Warfare

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Battlefield Emotions in Late Antiquity

*A Study of Fear and Motivation
in Roman Military Treatises*

By

Łukasz Różycki

Translated by

Krzysztof Chorzewski



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Cover illustration: Konstantinos Doukas and his men distract their pursuers. *Codex Graecus Matritensis Ioannis Skylitzes* fol. 13v. With kind permission of the Biblioteca Nacional de España.

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Σας ευχαριστώ όλους!

Introduction

Fear¹ has been a driving force for humanity since the beginning of time and served as one of the main motivators for change.² Fear of hunger makes us gather food; fear of our neighbors makes us fortify our homes and surround them with defensive walls; fear of poverty makes us work beyond our limits; fear of “the other” makes us close our doors. Humankind is in many ways governed by fear, one that we often cannot explain in any reasonable manner. We are ashamed of this fact, and we attempt to hide it. When afraid, a person acts on instinct, sheds the mask of a civilized creature and reverts to atavistic behaviors.³ Fear can bring out the worst of our characteristics that are normally hidden behind the carefully crafted veil of humanity. It is often the catalyst for other instincts, conformity⁴ in a panicked crowd.⁵ In such cases, we may talk about contagious fear that completely overwhelms a group. A mob gripped by panic stops acting rationally, while someone who is afraid seeks safety in numbers, putting his life above anything else. A soldier fleeing from a

- 1 Naturally, this study on fear on the battlefields of Antiquity is an expansion and continuation of my previous studies on the issue of fear in Byzantine military manuals. See more in: Łukasz Różycki, “Strach – elementy słowiańskiej „wojny psychologicznej” w świetle Strategikonu,” *Prace Historyczne* 141/4 (2014): 853–861; Łukasz Różycki, “Fear – an aspect of Byzantine Psychological Warfare,” *Vox Patrum* 35/63 (2015): 459–473; Łukasz Różycki, “Fear – elements of Slavic ‘Psychological Warfare,’” *Journal of Ancient History and Archeology* 2/1 (2015): 23–29; Łukasz Różycki, *Strach i motywacja na późnoantycznym polu bitwy w świetle rzymskich traktatów wojskowych* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2018).
- 2 For a brief history of fear, see: Stuart Walton, *A Natural History of Human Emotions* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 1–42. For methodological studies on fear see Joanna Bourke, “Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotions in Modern History,” *History Workshop Journal* 55/1 (2003): 111–133.
- 3 The very idea of “cultural atavism” has met with a lot of controversy and in several instances was even used ideologically. See e.g.: Hayek, Friedrich. “The Atavism of Social Justice,” in *New Studies in Philosophy, Politics, Economics and the History of Ideas*, ed. Friedrich Hayek (London: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 57–68.
- 4 See, for example: Mortimer Applezweig and George Moeller. *Conforming behavior and personality variables* (New London: Connecticut College, 1958); Keise Izuma, “The neural basis of social influence and attitude change,” *Current Opinion in Neurobiology* 23/3 (2013): 456–462; Micah G. Edelson, Tali Sharot, Raymond J. Dolan and Yadin Dudai. “Following the crowd: brain substrates of long-term memory conformity,” *Science* 333 (2011): 108–111; Rüdiger Peuckert, *Konformität. Erscheinungsformen – Ursachen – Wirkungen*, Enke (Stuttgart: Enke, 1975); Gordon Allport, *The nature of prejudice* (Cambridge: Addison-Wesley, 1954), 285–286.
- 5 For crowd psychology and contemporary scientists’ approach to it see Stephen Reicher, “The Psychology of Crowd Dynamics,” in *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Group Processes*, ed. Michael A. Hogg and Scott Tindale, (Oxford: Wiley, 2001), 182–183.

cavalry charge may be subconsciously aware that such behavior spells certain death, but he will nevertheless act according to his instincts. In short, fear is one of the most crucial primal emotions related to survival and has accompanied our species from the very beginning.

Fear makes us take certain actions,⁶ but it also prevents us from acting rashly.⁷ Mastering one's fear was, and remains to this day, a source of great power.⁸ Its effects, in the context of this study, can be summed up by the words of Józef Pieter, one of Poland's earliest researchers of fear:

Physiologically speaking, fear results in mobilizing all of the body's strength, and then externalizing it in order to protect oneself.⁹

Of all the different types of fear, one of the strongest is the fear of death.¹⁰ This feeling is so overwhelming, that it often paralyzes individuals and triggers primal responses. Therefore the presence of fear on the battlefield is both understandable and – to anyone with military experience – natural.¹¹ It was, is and will likely remain the dominant feeling experienced by all parties in any

6 On the subject of motivating factors, but also an important aspect of how recklessness was perceived in the period in question, see: Adrian Keith Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army at War 100 BC–AD 200* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 264–266; Michał Stachura, “Psychologiczne motywacje żołnierskiej brawury w świetle badań nad antyczną inwektywą,” *Prace Historyczne* 141/4 (2014): 819–828. Compare also with the 11th century when Roman military processes underwent profound changes: John Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565–1204* (London: Routledge, 1999), 228–233.

7 See, for example, the studies by: Neal Miller, “Studies of fear as an acquirable drive: I. Fear as motivation and fear-reduction as reinforcement in the learning of new responses,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 38/1 (1948): 89–101; Dennis McGurk, and Carl Andrew Castro. “Courage in combat,” in *The psychology of courage: Modern research on an ancient virtue*, ed. Cynthia L.S. Pury and Shane J. Lopez (London: Springer, 2010), 170–171.

8 David L. Altheide, *Creating Fear News and the Construction of Crisis* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 14–18.

9 Józef Pieter, *Strach i odwaga* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1971), 45. See also: Arne Ohman, “The Biology of Fear: Evolutionary, Neutral and Psychological Perspectives,” in *Fear Across the Disciplines*, ed. Jan Plamper and Benjamin Lazier (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 35–51.

10 It should be emphasized that fear is a specific expression of human experience, which means that any individual may react differently in a dangerous situation. However, even if a given person overreacts to certain threats, and underestimates others, the feeling of fear in a life-threatening situation is always present.

11 See an excellent case study: Stephen Morillo, “Expecting Cowardice: Medieval Battle Tactics Reconsidered,” *Journal of Medieval Military History* 4 (2006): 65–73.

military conflict.¹² Throughout the ages, men attempted to suppress it by various means – using alcohol,¹³ drugs,¹⁴ rage¹⁵ – or to replace it with a different kind of fear. However, eliminating this state of mind is difficult, and to this day no one has managed to do so completely. A soldier devoid of instincts becomes nothing more than a simple tool, and although fear can cripple a man, it can also force people to act, and as such may be seen as a positive factor. It was frequently used as a weapon by canny commanders, in order to strike at the enemy's morale. It is a soldier's constant companion, regardless of the historical period. We must take it into account, no matter what the surviving historical sources say, and no matter what methods for understanding the human psyche were used at the time. An ancient soldier gripping his sword and raising his shield would be faced with a terrifying¹⁶ – at times culturally

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- 12 Carrie Kennedy, Jamie Hacker Huges and Jeffrey A. McNeil, "A History of Military Psychology," in *Military Psychology Clinical and Operational Applications*, ed. Carrie Kennedy and Eric A. Zillmer (New York: The Guilford Press, 2006), 1–21. The subject of fear and panic on modern battlefields was also analyzed by: Thomas Kolditz, et al. *Why They Fight: Combat Motivation in the Iraq War*. (Carlisle: Lulu, 2003); commissioned by the Polish Armed Forces: Stanisław Konieczny, *Strach i odwaga w działaniach bojowych* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1964); Stanisław Konieczny, *Panika wojenna* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1969). An excellent breakdown of modern psychological warfare can be found in MC 402/1 NATO Military Policy on Psychological Operations.
- 13 As early as in Ancient Egypt, see: Richard Gabriel, *Thutmose III: The Military Biography of Egypt's Greatest Warrior King* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2009), 220.
- 14 Here we might point out, e.g. the popularity of LSD in the armed forces: Ketchum, James and Harry Salem. "Incapacitating Agents," in *Medical Aspects of Chemical Warfare*, ed. Shirley D. Tuorinsky (Washington: Department of the Army, 2008), 412–413.
- 15 The prime example would be the myth of the berserkers, which to this day continues to capture the imagination of some military scholars. John Protevi, "Affect, agency, and responsibility. The act of killing in the age of cyborgs," in *War and the Body Militarisation, practice and experience*, ed. Kevin McSorley (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), 132. For the myth itself in the context of Nordic sources see Vincent Samson, *Les Berserkir: Les guerriers-fauves dans la Scandinavie ancienne, de l'âge de Vendel aux vikings (VI^e–XI^e siècle)* (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2011); with special emphasis placed on the sacralization of war: 23–24.
- 16 Romans understood the phenomenon of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) caused by war, although we lack the methods to determine what symptoms Roman veterans manifested. Compare: Aislinn Melchior, "Caesar in Vietnam: did Roman Soldiers Suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder?" *Greece&Rome* 58/2 (2011): 209–223. See also a short history of PTSD: Horwitz, *PTSD*, especially pages 1–19 for how the phenomenon was perceived throughout the ages, and pages 51–80, which describe the impact of combat on human psyche. Another fascinating analysis of the issue can be found in: Jonathan Shay, *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (New York: Scribner, 2002), 149–204. Nowadays the problem of transitioning back to civilian life after military service is serious enough that there is a whole category of re-adjustment

alien¹⁷ – adversary, who wanted his death. In the case of any other soldier standing against a mortal enemy on a field of battle, the man-at-arms would experience fear, and instincts would tell him to react in two possible ways – to drop the weapon and flee from danger as far away as possible,¹⁸ or to kill.

In terms of mastering the dread of one's soldiers, the Romans turned it into an art which is used with good results to this day.¹⁹ Military training, at least after Augustus established a standing army,²⁰ was designed to minimize the effects of fear, instill a sense of duty in soldiers, and make certain reactions automatic.²¹ On the battlefield, a soldier will always show more courage when he believes in himself and the military training he has received. He will be motivated to engage in the fighting by promises of rewards, faith in the legitimacy of a conflict, hatred of the enemy, and his religion, as well as fear of punishment for fleeing the battlefield, or fighting hand in hand with friends ready

manuals and scientific studies available. See: Janelle B. Moore, Don Philpott and Cheryl Lawhorne-Scott. *Life After the Military: A Handbook for Transitioning Veterans* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011); Jeremy Crosby, *The Civilian Life Field Manual: How to Adjust to the Civilian World after Military Service* (Indianapolis: Dog Ear Publishing, 2010).

- 17 There are many studies whose authors describe the barbarians from the perspective of the Romans; the most recent ones include: Edward James, *Europe's Barbarians AD 200–600* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 231–252; Iain Ferris, *Enemies of Rome: Barbarians through Roman Eyes* (Stroud: The History Press, 2000), with an extensive bibliography on the subject, and Greg Woolf, *Tales of the Barbarians: Ethnography and Empire in the Roman West* (Oxford: Wiley, 2011), 32–58.
- 18 Fear leads to either courage or cowardice, i.e. to the mental state that we consent to. Longin Klichowski, *Lęk, strach, panika: przyczyny i zapobieganie* (Poznań: Printer, 1994), 31; Luke Barnesmoore and Michael Fisher. "Courage/Couragelessness: Rethinking the Fear/Fearlessness Dialectic," *International Journal of Fear Studies* 1/1 (2019): 61–90. More on fear as an idea in Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 31–51.
- 19 Training in modern armed forces has been studied from a psychological point of view by: Ellen Hartmann, Tor Sunde, Wenche Kristensen and Monica Martinussen. "Psychological Measures As Predictors of Military Training Performance," *Journal of Personality Assessment* 80/1 (2003): 87–98. See also a gripping piece by: Henry Halff, James Hollan and Edwin Hutchins. "Cognitive science and military training," *American Psychologist* 41 (1986): 1131–1139. It is worth noting the similarities to modern training and that some modern methods of influencing soldiers are simply more developed forms of what was already applied in antiquity.
- 20 A system that did exist before, although in a much less institutionalized form.
- 21 Training in the Roman army was described, among others, by: Sara Elise Phang, *Roman Military Service: Ideologies of Discipline in the Late Republic and Early Principate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 37–73. The issue was also touched upon in: Ramsay MacMullen, "The Legion as a Society." *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 22/4 (1984): 440–456. The issue of dispelling fear through military training was diagnosed in a general way by Morillo, "Expecting Cowardice," 67–68.

to give their lives for a common cause. A soldier's motivation is also affected by the sight of his brothers in arms overcoming their fear and thus setting a good example.²² However, even with a functioning system of suppressing fear through training and motivation, soldiers would still at times flee from the battlefield. The Romans tried to prevent that through, ironically, a different type of fear, since any unit that fled was later decimated.²³ In this case the use of collective responsibility was supposed to create a mechanism of internal group control, and the inevitability of punishment additionally motivated the legionnaires to stop the mentally weakest members of a unit from running away.²⁴ Another tool of completely blocking or at least suppressing fear²⁵ was the military training aimed at blunting the instinctive responses of soldiers²⁶ that would normally make them protect their lives at all costs. The Roman army was the first to use, most likely unintentionally, the idea of "balance of fear", which is normally used to describe global relations during the Cold War,²⁷ but can also be applicable on a smaller scale. The Roman war machine consisted of many such elements, like the carefully crafted sense of camaraderie, fear of

22 McGurk, Castro, "Courage in Combat," 169.

23 Decimation (Lat. *decimatio*) was a form of collective punishment – it meant every tenth soldier in a given unit would be killed. The method was first mentioned (although without the name) by Titus Livius, *Ab Urbe condita*, 2. 59. An in-depth analysis of this phenomenon was presented by: Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 123–129. Phang finds decimation fascinating, precisely because it was a form of collective punishment.

24 This corroborates MacMullen's thesis. MacMullen, "The Legion as a Society," 455–456. It is also worth emphasizing the role of the commander as the individual impacting soldiers' behavior and preparing them for the mental challenges of fighting. See Carl Andrew Castro, Amy Adler, Dennis McGurk and Jeffrey L. Thomas. "Leader Actions to Enhance Soldier Resiliency in Combat," in *Human Dimensions in Military Operations – Military Leaders' Strategies for Addressing Stress and Psychological Support*, 3. 2–14.

25 Modern-day methods of blocking the fear of death on the battlefield, achieved through training and indoctrination, have led to an increased number of suicides among soldiers, who cease to be afraid of the consequences of their actions (fear of death disappears or is significantly reduced). See a fascinating study by: Edward Selby et al. "Overcoming the fear of lethal injury: Evaluating suicidal behavior in the military through the lens of the Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide," *Clinical Psychology Review* 30/3 (2010): 298–307. About the transcultural reasons for committing suicide and seeking death on the battlefield in military communities in the Middle Ages, see Stephen Morillo, "Cultures of Death: Warrior Suicide in Europe and Japan," *The Medieval History Journal* 4/2 (2001): 241–257, with a strong emphasis placed on the huge differences between the elitist cultures of warriors in Japan and Europe.

26 Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 222–225.

27 This was known as *balance of terror*. See: Albert Wohlstetter, *The Delicate Balance of Terror*. RAND, 1985.

certain punishment for breaking military discipline,²⁸ fear of senior officers, the motivating power of possible advancement through the ranks, etc. Taken as a whole, these aspects were supposed to achieve a single goal – that when a Roman soldier faced an enemy, he would choose to risk his life in battle rather than flee.

Late Roman law is full of provisions that specify very strict punishment for soldiers who left their unit without official leave, especially in the face of an enemy force. The high count of provisions dealing with deserters indicates that our image of the Roman army is idealized,²⁹ and that the terror of war affected even the well-oiled Roman war machine, and its component parts – the legionnaires.³⁰

Soldiers were incentivized in various ways to fight.³¹ We need to bear in mind that in an army motivation is not always overt and that the goal of the soldiers, i.e. usually to survive a clash, is not consistent with the goal of the commander, who aims to win the battle³² even at the cost of his subordinates'

28 On that subject, see: Clarence Eugene Brand, *Roman Military Law* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968). and in relation to *Strategikon*: Edwin Hanson Freshfield, *Roman law in the Later Roman Empire Military discipline of the Emperor Maurice c. A.D. 590 from the Strategikon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947).; also, for comparison: Joseph Bray, *Essai Sur Le Droit Penal Militaire Des Romains: Droit International de L'Occupation Militaire en Temps de Guerre*. (PhD diss., Paris, 1894).

29 Explaining why this is so would require at least a separate article. As early as in the middle ages the Roman army was already considered an unparalleled model, which ought to be emulated as closely as possible. A case in point would be Maurice of Orleans, who tried to organize his infantry units according to the treatise of Vegetius, and his failure to do so was blamed not on the shortcomings of the legionary system but rather on the poor quality of the recruits, who could not compare to Roman legionnaires.

30 The first individual who turns and flees should be seen as the instigator, who becomes the model for the whole panicking crowd to follow. Christopher Cocking, John Drury and Steve Reicher. "The psychology of crowd behaviour in emergency evacuations: Results from two interview studies and implications for the Fire and Rescue Services," *The Irish Journal of Psychology* 30/1–2 (2009): 59–74.

31 See the breakthrough work by: Ilya Berkovich, *Motivation in War The Experience of Common Soldiers in Old-Regime Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). Particularly the chapter devoted to the study on motivation (pages 17–54) and potential models for motivation processes in the armies of the past. However, my goal is not to carry out a comprehensive study on motivation in the Roman army, but rather to analyze how it relates to battlefield terrors↑

32 The importance of goals in the motivation process was described in: James Y. Shah and Arie W. Kruglanski. "The Structure and Substance of Intrinsic Motivation," in *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation: The Search for Optimal Motivation and Performance*. ed. Carol Sansone and Judith M. Harackiewicz (San Diego – London: Academic Press, 2000), 106–123. Particularly pages 106–108. On the subject of internal motivation (self-motivation) in contemporary armies, there have been a few promising studies; most notably, the

lives. This material difference largely affects the whole process of leading people in war³³ and necessitates seeking non-standard solutions. One factor that has proven to be an effective motivator in similar situations is reward.³⁴ The prospect of reward could modify the goals of a soldier, bringing them more in line with the goals of the commander, making it a powerful tool for controlling behavior.³⁵ The reward in question might be promotion, the promise of rich spoils, favorable treatment from the commander, and so on. Another strong motivator was shame, particularly before one's comrades. Brotherly relations in an army brought a unit closer together, motivating the soldiers to risk their lives out of a sense of honor and duty towards their friends, who were themselves in a similar situation. It was the role of the commander to bring these feelings to the front and reinforce them to achieve the best possible result in a coming battle. The Romans deliberately heightened the sense of brotherhood among soldiers, who sometimes lived their entire military lives as part of a single *contubernium*. A sense of brotherhood in arms³⁶ and responsibility before comrades were of paramount importance in the process of boosting morale. The rules included in *Praecepta militaria* are an excellent example of attention paid to brotherhood in arms; in the description of each formation, the author made the point that soldiers in a *contubernium* should be organized as in a battle formation and bonded by friendship.³⁷ This is an indication that the structure of the *contubernium* was intended to cultivate friendship among

following internal report: Thomas Kenneth and Erik Jansen. "Intrinsic Motivation in the Military: Models and Strategic Importance," in *Technical Report NPS-SM-96-001* (Monterey, 1996).

- 33 Edward Tory Higgins, "Ideals, Oughts, and Regulatory Focus: Affect and Motivation from Distinct Pains and Pleasures," in *The Psychology of Action: Linking Cognition and Motivation to Behavior*, ed. Peter M. Gollwitzer and John A. Bargh (New York: The Guilford Press, 1996), 91–114.
- 34 It remains questionable whether such imposed external motivation is more effective than self-motivation. See: Richard M. Ryan and Edward L. Deci. "When Rewards Compete with Nature: The Undermining of Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Regulation," in *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation: The Search for Optimal Motivation and Performance*, ed. Carol Sansone and Judith M. Harackiewicz (San Diego – London: Academic Press, 2000), 14–56. Particularly pages 46–48.
- 35 Ryan, Deci, "When Rewards Compete with Nature," 37–38.
- 36 The importance of a sense of team spirit on the battlefield has been highlighted by contemporary scholars studying relations in the army. They clearly emphasize the role of the commander in stimulating positive interactions between soldiers. More in Castro, Adler, McGurk, Thomas, "Leader Actions to Enhance Soldier Resiliency in Combat," 3. 8.
- 37 *Praecepta militaria*, 1. 2; 3. 10. In the same vein: Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, 60. 10; 61. 1. emphasis placed on the importance of friendship in relations between soldiers.

soldiers and ensure that they fought next to each other during battle.³⁸ As a result, a commander could expect bonded soldiers to be better motivated, less prone to fear of the enemy and less likely to flee.³⁹ Brotherly relations between soldiers were also used in a systemic way, for example in the internal control mechanisms described further in this book, stimulated externally by the rules of military law. For centuries, in the Roman army, *esprit de corps* played an important role just like in any professional military force, providing additional ways of influencing the soldiers.

The above introduction can be summed up in the following manner. Every soldier standing face to face with an enemy is afraid of death. This is true for any army, regardless of morale⁴⁰ or mental preparation. Less resolute soldiers choose flight rather than fight, somewhat unrealistically evaluating their chances of survival as higher in that scenario. Irrespective of the level of training, the means of motivation, the use of draconian punishments, or the strength of social relations among soldiers, every military force nears its breaking point during battle. The side whose soldiers are able to resist their instincts for longer, will usually win. Most battles in history resulted in one side retreating, and examples of a defeated force that chose death instead of running away are the stuff of legends to this day.⁴¹ The Roman army, contrary to popular belief, was not invincible, and the legionnaires serving in its ranks were ordinary people. Their main advantages were the excellent training (for the time), the high level of material culture, and the conscious use of stratagems and tricks that increased their chances of victory in battle.

38 For subsequent periods see especially Brian Joseph Martin, *Napoleonic Friendship: Military Fraternity, Intimacy, and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century France (Becoming Modern: New Nineteenth-Century Studies)* (Hanover – London: University of New Hampshire Press, 2011), 68–102. Unfortunately, the sources on Late Antiquity make it impossible to even consider this reconstruction.

39 Further in this book, the mechanisms affecting this behavior will be discussed in detail.
40 On the subject of morale in the Roman army, see: Petru Ureche, “The Soldiers’ Morale in the Roman Army,” *Journal of Ancient History and Archeology* 1/3 (2014): 3–7; Mike Bishop, “On parade: status display and morale in the Roman army,” in *Akten des 14. Internationalen Limeskongresses 1986 in Carnuntum vol. 2*, ed. Hermann Vetters and Manfred Kandler (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1990), 21–30; Doug A. Lee, “Morale and the Roman Experience of Battle,” in *Battle in Antiquity*, ed. Alan B. Lloyd (London: Classical Press of Wales, 1996), 199–218. Morale in the period in question has also been the subject of interest of Philip Rance, who has emphasized the poor state of research into the issue. Philip Rance, “Simulacra Pugnæ: The Literary and Historical tradition of Mock Battles in the Roman and Early Byzantine Army,” *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 41/3 (2000): 224.

41 As a case in point, we only need to remind ourselves how the actions of King Leonidas at the Battle of Thermopylae affected future generations.

1 The Purpose of the Work and the Current State of Research

The title *Battlefield Emotions in Late Antiquity. A Study of Fear and Motivation in Roman Military Treatises* already specifies that the study will deal with both the methods of suppressing as well as instilling fear, and with various methods of motivating soldiers, often closely linked to fear.⁴² The purpose of this monograph is to take a fresh look at Late Roman warfare through the lens of the theatre of war. In short, to analyze all non-combat means employed by Roman commanders that were supposed to increase their chances of victory, either by affecting their own soldiers, or the enemy's.

Until some decades ago our perception of a Roman legionnaire or an Early Byzantine⁴³ soldier was the same as for fighters from any other period in history, and the human factor on the field of battle was either ignored or marginalized. Among the first representatives of this trend in modern historiography was Hans Delbrück, an illustrious German military historian⁴⁴ whose studies centered on the social and demographic aspects of war.⁴⁵ The soldier was seen

42 These relations have been studied by modern psychologists for many years now. See, for example: Neal Miller, "Studies of fear as an acquirable drive: I. Fear as motivation and fear-reduction as reinforcement in the learning of new responses," *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 38/1 (1948): 89–101; Ronald Rogers, "A Protection Motivation Theory of Fear Appeals and Attitude Change," *The Journal of Psychology* 91/1 (1975): 93–114. Or, on very contemporary use of fear as a motivator in marketing activities: John Tanner et al. "The Protection Motivation Model: A Normative Model of Fear Appeals," *Journal of Marketing* 55/3 (1991): 36–45.

43 In further sections of the work I will consistently be using the terms "Roman" and "Rome" to refer to the Eastern Roman Empire in the Migration Period and in Early Middle Ages. See more in: Iōannēs Karagiannopoulos, *Η πολιτική θεωρία των βυζαντινών* (Thessaloniki: Vaniak, 1992), 7–13.

44 Hans Delbrück made a huge contribution to the development of military history by making use of auxiliary disciplines in reference to military history and re-interpretations of the descriptions of famous battles. Among his lifetime achievements was the monumental series *Geschichte der Kriegskunst im Rahmen der politischen Geschichte* where he tried to combine political and social history with military history. This is evident in the case of his studies of feudalism in the volume dedicated to the Middle Ages. In volume two, entitled *Die Germanen* and published in 1901, he extensively presented the fall of the Roman Empire (pp. 259–355), the reign of Justinian I and the wars with the Goths (pp. 355–404). Delbrück's findings on the tactics and the organization of Justinian's army still hold some merit (pp. 355–367 and 392–405). The third volume (*Das Mittelalter*) revolves around war in the Middle Ages, although the author did not focus only on the West, presenting also Arab and East-Roman military solutions. The chapter devoted to the Roman Empire is largely based on military treatises (pp. 194–210) as reliable sources of information.

45 This does not mean that tactics, social history or army structures have prevailed in military history. Before John Keegan's works, Jan Frans Verbruggen, a Belgian historian, wrote *De Krijgskunst in West-Europa in de Middeleeuwen* (translated into English in 1997).

as simply a single cog in a grand and infallible military machine, whose functioning was determined by top-down factors, such as strategy, tactics, training and discipline. The same factors could be analyzed when studying any army, from any historical period, with the same results. This was a close-minded thought pattern, where the soldier was presented as some sort of finished product – a combination of training, discipline and military law. The product/soldier would only change if there were any changes to army organization or technology, and was considered to not be affected by cultural or psychological factors. This dehumanizing presentation of fighting men as nothing more than parts in the military machine is nowadays referred to as the *universal soldier* idea. A similar attitude was adopted when studying battles – it was not the soldiers who won or lost the engagement, but rather the commanding officers, who employed tactics superior to those of their defeated enemies. War was reduced to a strategic tabletop game between heads of state and army commanders, and battles – to orderly tactical diagrams drawn up on maps. Nowadays we know that reality was infinitely more complicated.

The pattern of thought described above was first rejected by John Keegan in his book entitled *The Face of Battle*.⁴⁶ Keegan was one of the most influential scholars of the army, who rejected the classic approach to military history. The purpose of the works of this exceptional British academic was to try and look at the chaos of war from the point of view of individual soldiers and to tell the story of these soldiers by employing the widest possible array of research tools.⁴⁷ The publication of *The Face of Battle* in 1976 caused this new research approach to spread into general academic circles where its potential was recognized. It was later adopted, e.g. by John A. Lynn, who in his most prominent work: *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture*⁴⁸ dared to ask bold

J.F. Verbruggen's work centering on medieval military solutions includes chapters dedicated to cavalrymen's panic on the battlefield (Jan Frans Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe During the Middle Ages: From the Eighth Century to 1340* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 1997), 44–46), knights' fear of infantry (pp. 46–49), the spoils of war (pp. 49–50) as well as the solidarity and cohesion of foot soldiers (pp. 172–177) and their battle psychology (pp. 177–182). See also: John Christopher Malcolm Baynes, *Morale. The Second Scottish Rifles at the battle of Neuve Chapelle* (London: Leo Cooper, 1967).

- 46 John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976). A critique of Keegan's narrative style: Everett L. Wheeler, "Firepower: Missile Weapons and the 'Face of Battle,'" *Electrum* 5 (2001): 169–184.
- 47 Both rank-and-file, as well as officers: John Keegan, and Richard Holmes, *Soldiers, A History of Men in Battle* (New York: Elisabeth Sifton Books, 1986); John Keegan, *The Mask of Command* (London: Penguin Books, 1988). And for a synthesis of new approach to military history: John Keegan, *A History Of Warfare* (New York: Vintage, 1994).
- 48 John A. Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).

and innovative questions: to what extent was the soldier, and consequently – the soldier’s behavior, dependent on cultural factors.⁴⁹ The results of studies by J. Keegan and his followers (who include, among others, Charles Carlton,⁵⁰ Aislinn Melchior⁵¹ and Richard Holmes⁵²) have led to the emergence of so-called new military history.

In this book, studies focusing on military history overlap with research into the history of emotions⁵³ which is only natural when studying fear and motivation.⁵⁴ Research into the history of emotions started simultaneously with pioneering works by Peter and Carol Stearn,⁵⁵ Barbara H. Rosenwein⁵⁶ and William Reddy⁵⁷ who introduced emotions into history as a factor impacting human decisions and relations.⁵⁸ They have demonstrated that this human phenomenon, which is subject to cross-cultural variability, can also be historicized.⁵⁹ Consequently, they started a new branch of research in the humanities, closely related to sociology, psychology⁶⁰ and even psychiatry. New military history introduced research into soldiers’ emotions on the battlefield earlier, and therefore developed independently from contemporary *emotionology*.

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- 49 This led to the creation of such works as: Patrick Porter, “Good Anthropology, Bad History: The Cultural Turn in Studying War,” *Parameters* 2/37 (2007): 45–58.
- 50 Charles Carlton, *Going to the Wars: The Experience of the British Civil Wars, 1638–1651* (London: Routledge, 1994).
- 51 Melchior, “Caesar in Vietnam,” 209–223.
- 52 Richard Holmes, *Firing Line* (Oxford: Jonathan Cape, 1985).
- 53 See for example the first meaningful approach to emotions and gender in Mati Meyer, “Towards an Approach to Gendered Emotions in Byzantine Culture: An Introduction,” in *Emotions and Gender in Byzantine Culture*, ed. Stavroula Constantinou and Mati Meyer (London: Springer, 2019), 3–34.
- 54 Lately, the correctness of this trend in research has been indicated by: Florin Curta, *Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages (500–1300)* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 462.
- 55 Peter N. Stearns and Carol Z. Stearns, “Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards,” *The American Historical Review* 90/4 (1985): 813–836.
- 56 See for example Rosenwein, Barbara H. Rosenwein, and Riccardo Cristiani, *What is the History of Emotions?* (Cambridge – Medford: Wiley, 2018).
- 57 William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- 58 Studies on the history of emotions are briefly presented by Carolyn Strange, “Historical perspectives on honour, violence and emotions,” in *Honour, Violence and Emotions in History*, ed. Carolyn Strange, Christopher E. Forth and Robert Cribb (London – New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1–22. See also Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
- 59 Strange, “Historical perspectives on honor,” 4.
- 60 William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3–34.

Studies of ancient and medieval Roman battlefields in the context of new military history have yielded a number of excellent works, whose authors were heavily influenced by the experiences and conclusions of early practitioners of this new approach. On the subject of ancient military history, we have pieces by such authors as Adrian Keith Goldsworthy,⁶¹ Brian Campbell,⁶² Ross Cowan,⁶³ Kate Gilliver⁶⁴ and several others.⁶⁵ In Poland, the trend of studying Antiquity using the new military history approach is represented by several excellent historians specializing in Antiquity and the Byzantine Empire.⁶⁶ Many scholars adopting this new attitude have modelled their studies after J.A. Lynn, focusing on the social and cultural factors that affect army men and, going further – have applied this methodology to armies in times of peace, using mostly historiographic, epigraphic and, increasingly frequently, prescriptive sources.

We should also point out that Polish scholars have achieved much in the study of battlefield stress and, more generally, social psychology. Already in communist times the Ministry of National Defence commissioned Stanisław Konieczny to prepare two papers on the subject of wartime panic, which were first published in the 1960s. In a way this was a response to *The American Soldier: Adjustment During Army Life*,⁶⁷ published in 1949. The Polish translation of this

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- 61 Whom I have already referred to many times: Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army at War*.
- 62 Brian Campbell, *War and society in Imperial Rome 31 BC–AD 284* (London: Routledge, 2002).
- 63 Ross Cowan, “The Clashing of Weapons and the Silent Advances in Roman Battles,” *Historia* 56/1 (2007): 114–117.
- 64 Kate Gilliver, “Display in Roman Warfare: The appearance of armies and individuals on the battlefield,” *War in History* 14/1 (2007): 1–21.
- 65 Lee, “Morale and the Roman Experience of Battle,” 199–218; P. Ureche, “The Soldiers’ Morale in the Roman Army,” 3–7 or this controversial piece: Richard Gabriel, *The Madness of Alexander the Great: And the Myth of Military Genius* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2015).
- 66 See for example: Michał Norbert Faszczka, “Przemoc symboliczna jako forma utrzymywania dyscypliny w republikańskiej armii rzymskiej,” in *Przemoc w świecie starożytnym. Źródła – struktura – interpretacje*, ed. Dariusz Słapek and Ireneusz Łuć (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2017), 101–118.; Maciej Wilczyński, “Oddziaływania psychologiczne i dyscyplinujące w armiach późnego antyku,” *Prace Historyczne* 141/4 (2014): 841–852; Stachura, “Psychologiczne motywacje żołnierskiej brawury w świetle badań nad antyczną inekwytą,” 819–828; Kiril Marinow, “Mountain warfare in the Byzantine-Bulgarian military struggles, the end of 10th – the beginning of 11th century. Between theory and practice,” in *South-Eastern Europe in the Second Half of 10th – the Beginning of the 11th Centuries: History and Culture. Proceedings of the international conference, Sofia, 6–8 October 2014*, ed. Vasil T. Gjuzelev and Georgi N. Nukolov (Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2015), 95–107.
- 67 Samuel A. Stouffer, and Edward A. Suchman ed. *The American Soldier Adjustment During Army Life Studies in social psychology in World War II vol. 1*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949).

pivotal work appeared on the market only ten years later. Since I personally do not have a degree in psychology, certain sections of my work will be largely based on the published results of studies. One of the Polish scholars whose research I will often be referring to is the illustrious psychologist Józef Pieter, the author of *Strach i Odwaga* [*Fear and Courage*].⁶⁸ In his analysis of fear and courage Pieter did not deal with war, but his observations about the physiological aspects of terror and typical human behavior in many instances help to explain in a straightforward fashion the suggestions put forward by the authors of Roman military treatises.

The purpose of this work is to take a multi-perspective look at the Late Roman army, in times of peace as well as war, through the prism of military treatises, while employing the research methods of new military history. The notion of Late Antiquity in the title of the book sets some broad chronological limits. The research will center on the 6th century, which is when the *Strategikon* – the most frequently quoted military treatise – was written, together with two excellent narrative sources: works by Procopius of Caesarea and Theophylact Simocatta, sometimes referred to by contemporary historians as the last period of the power of the Roman Empire.⁶⁹ Still, the narration will frequently go back to the time of writing of Vegetius' work and the revival of Roman military literature during the reign of the Macedonian dynasty. The focus of the analysis will shift from social and cultural aspects to battlefield psychology and social psychology. These avenues of study are very promising in the context of the Roman battlefield, and there have already been attempts in global literature to synthesize the results of similar research projects.⁷⁰ Despite these attempts, which dealt with ancient military history,⁷¹ there have as yet been no serious studies of Late Antiquity in the context of new military history making use of battlefield psychology.⁷²

68 Pieter, *Strach i odwaga*.

69 Curta, *Eastern Europe in the Middle Ages*, 31–40.

70 Here we should once again shine a spotlight on the piece: Melchior, "Caesar in Vietnam," 209–223, in which the author attempted to use the tools of modern psychiatry and psychology.

71 This issue was analyzed by the authors of the collaborative piece: Garrett Fagan, and Matthew Trundle ed. *New Perspectives on Ancient Warfare* (Leiden: Brill, 2010). See also a very interesting book by Conor Whately, *Battles and Generals: Combat, Culture, and Didacticism in Procopius' Wars* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

72 An interesting text analyzing militarized barbarian communities is an exception here: Guido M. Berndt, "The Goths Drew their Swords Together' Individual and Collective Acts of Violence by Gothic Warlords and their War Bands," in *Killing and Being Killed: Bodies in Battle Perspectives on Fighters in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jörg Rogge (Bielefeld: De Gruyter, 2017.), 15–42.

2 Chronological Framework and Structure of the Work

The notion of Late Antiquity used in the title of the book is a key which offers interpretational opportunities. While the major sources go back to the 6th century, the very broad notion of Late Antiquity introduced by Peter Brown,⁷³ and set by him between 250 and 800 AD, allows us to extend the source basis considerably include other extremely important military treatises supplementing the subject. Despite the fact that military treatises were read throughout the time of the Eastern Roman Empire,⁷⁴ the changes to military solutions which took place in the 11th century put an end to the traditional form of literature as we know it from ancient times.⁷⁵ Therefore, Late Antiquity as interpreted for the purpose of this book and set in military literature by the existence of the form of military treatises⁷⁶ should be defined as the period from the creation of Vegetius' work until the 11th century, i.e. Psellos' antiquarian work and that of Kekaumenos.⁷⁷ Three treatises comprise this book's primary sources: *De Re Militari* by Vegetius, *Strategikon* written in the late 6th or in the early 7th century,⁷⁸ and a work whose date of origin has stimulated heated discussions,⁷⁹ namely *De Re Strategica* by Syrianus Magister.⁸⁰

73 Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: from Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad (AD 150–750)* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1971), 7–10.

74 Philip Rance, "Late Byzantine Elites and Military Literature: Authors, Readers and Manuscripts (11th–15th Centuries)" in *A Military History of the Mediterranean Sea – Aspects of War, Diplomacy and Military Elites*, ed. Georgios Theotokis and Aysel Yildiz (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 255–286.

75 Karl Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur von Justinian bis zum Ende des oströmischen Reiches (527–1453)* (München: Beck, 1891), 635–636; Salvatore Cosentino, "Writing about war in Byzantium," *Revista de História das Ideias* 30 (2009): 84; Alphonse Dain and Jules Albert de Foucault, "Les stratégistes byzantins," *Travaux et Mémoires* 2 (1967): 319–333; Vladimir Kucma, "Militärische Traktate," in *Quellen zur Geschichte des frühen Byzanz (4.–9. Jahrhundert). Bestand und Probleme*, ed. Friedhelm Winkelmann, Wolfram Brandes (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1990), 327–335.

76 It needs to be emphasized very strongly that the form of the military treatise as they were written in the 10th and the 11th centuries is a changed literary formula dating back to classical Antiquity.

77 Both treatises are of minor importance to these considerations.

78 More detailed dating of the treatises in question will be focused on in the section of the work devoted specifically to the analyzed sources.

79 The date when Syrianus Magister wrote his work will be discussed in the section describing the primary sources.

80 The emphasis will be on Syrianus's work which dealt with strategy and tactics, although I will also touch upon certain topics from his "naval treatise". On the decline of naval traditions in the Empire in the 6th century, see: Constantine Zuckerman, "Learning from the Enemy and More. Studies in 'Dark Centuries' Byzantium," *Millennium Jahrbuch zu*

The work is broken down into eight chapters, with an introduction and concluding section. The first chapter specifies the categories of sources studied and their characteristics, especially with regard to literary *topoi* and anachronisms. Then, it briefly describes the three primary sources of the study: *De Re Militari*, *De Re Strategica*, *Strategikon* and, in short, supplementary military treatises. The second chapter, serving as introduction to the subject of study, illustrates different Roman approaches to warfare as presented in military treatises. The next section, being the first analytical one, deals with the subject of fighting fear. It lists various methods of suppressing fear used by Roman commanders in different situations (fear of the enemy, or of the unknown). Chapter 4 (Weaponizing fear) is devoted entirely to methods of using terror as an effective tool of war. Some of the analyzed stratagems and suggestions can also be applied to protecting one's own troops from terror, and including these in this section instead of the previous one was simply a matter of the author's preference. What it covers is methods of using scouts, intimidating the enemy with battle cries or silence, and also making use of deserters, traitors, spies and envoys. The next chapter is about the role of the commander in handling fear and motivating soldiers as shown in Roman military treatises. It delves deeper into military law, manipulation of available information and speeches given before the ranks. The last analytical chapter deals with what happens immediately after the fighting ends. All possible outcomes were taken into account – victory, defeat, and stalemate. It comprises several sub-chapters, each of which analyzes the instructions given by authors of military treatises on manipulating and incentivizing soldiers, who are mentally and physically exhausted after a clash. The final sections of the work consist of the concluding chapter followed by the bibliography.

3 Methodology

Military treatises⁸¹ are a type of historical source that remains widely unused to this day and yet can bring something new to the study of Late Ancient and

Kultur und Geschichte des ersten Jahrtausends n. Chr. 2 (2005): 117. The latest edition of *Naumachiai* can be found in: Syrianos Magistros, *Ναυμαχίαι Συριανοῦ Μαγίστρου*, translated by Elizabeth Jeffreys and John Pryor, in: *The Age of the Δρομον The Byzantine Navy ca. 500–1204*. Leiden: Brill, 2006, 455–483.

81 An excellent introduction to the entire genre with an attempt at a literary definition in: Brian Campbell, "Teach Yourself How to Be a General," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 77 (1987): 13–29. See also: Cosentino, "Writing about war in Byzantium," 83–99 especially 83–84; Dain and de Foucault, "Les stratégistes byzantins," 319–33; Luigi Loreto, "Il

Early Medieval battlefields.⁸² Their authors were usually closely tied to the army; they were often actual field commanders, who happened to put their thoughts and experiences down on paper. This presents us with a unique opportunity to identify the “human factor” on ancient battlefields;⁸³ to understand the mechanisms that made soldiers want to run away, or just the opposite – charge ahead without regard for their life. Of course, these treatises are mostly instructions for commanding officers on how to control people, their behavior and anxieties, in order to achieve victory over the enemy. Although this approach somewhat colors the image of the common soldier that we intend to study, it still allows us to illustrate the traits of soldiers as a community.⁸⁴ In order to achieve success in the field, each commander from Antiquity had first and foremost to shape the attitudes of his men, which was a complicated, multi-stage endeavor.

The main area of study of scholars from the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, i.e. tactics and strategy, as presented by colored arrows moved around a map, only constitutes a marginal portion of the whole of Late Ancient warfare. Contemporary humanist beliefs rightly teach us to reject violence in any form, but this aversion to war among today’s historians has led to the complete eradication of the human factor from our deliberations. We have stopped seeing individuals, and instead focused on grand goals, peace treaties, defeats and statistics while works by war theoreticians offer much more than information on tactics and armament, with the human factor playing a pivotal role. Some instructions were simple ruses, but many of them required extensive knowledge of human nature. Consequently, modern researchers who are equipped

generale e la Biblioteca. La trattatistica militare greca da Democrito di Abdera ad Alessio I Comneno,” in *Lo spazio letterario della Grecia antica, II, La ricezione e l’attualizzazione del testo vol. II*, ed. Diego Lanza and Luciano Camphor (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1995), 563–589; Kučma, “Militärtsche Traktate,” 327–335.

82 We need to bear in mind that military treatises can be further divided into sub-genres. See more in: McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth*, 171. And also: Denis Sullivan, “Byzantine Military Manuals: Prescriptions, Practice and Pedagogy,” in *The Byzantine World*, ed. Paul Stephenson (London: Routledge, 2010), 149–161.

83 Mostly in the form of mechanisms that govern collective behavior.

84 See also an interesting attempt to analyze the actions of human beings in extreme situations in Ammianus’s description. Adrian Szopa, “Jednostka na polu bitwy w źródłach późnoantycznych – wybrane przykłady,” *Prace Historyczne* 141/4 (2014): 829–840; See also a very important text: Philip Sabin, “The Face of Roman Battle,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 90 (2000): 1–17.

with contemporary interdisciplinary research methods, have the opportunity to achieve a deeper understanding of the chaos of war.⁸⁵

For the purposes of this study, I believe there is some value in also looking at narrative sources written by military men or people closely tied to the army – treating these sources as comparative material. Even if many descriptions of battles in classical historical works were simply invented by ancient authors for literary or patriotic purposes⁸⁶ or copied from earlier works, several works from Late Antiquity may serve as supplementary sources whose authors at least tried to depict the battlefield reality.⁸⁷ Throughout the history of the Eastern Roman Empire, within the specified chronological framework, such sources are few and far between. One notable author is Ammianus Marcellinus,⁸⁸ an experienced soldier and keen observer of military life, whose *opus magnum* remains an endless repository of knowledge about the Roman army. Another item worth mentioning is the work of Procopius of Caesarea,⁸⁹ especially

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- 85 See the answer to the question “what is war?” given by J. Keegan in: Keegan, *A History Of Warfare*, 3–12, where he provides a counterpoint to, e.g. the famous opinion of Carl von Clausewitz.
- 86 Titus Livius, one of the most distinguished Roman historians, did that. See Tim Cornell, *The Beginnings of Rome: Italy and Rome from the Bronze Age to the Punic Wars (c.1000–264 BC)* (London – New York, Routledge, 1995), 1–30; Patrick Gerard Walsh, *Livy. His Historical Aims and Methods* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1961).
- 87 A good abstract of the sources and summary of the subject in Sabin, “The Face of Roman Battle,” 2–4. Notably, in Antiquity and the Middle Ages historians used to compile earlier works and battle descriptions; this poses methodological problems as described by Richard Abels and Stephen Morillo. See Richard Abels, and Stephen Morillo, “A Lying Legacy? A Preliminary Discussion of Images of Antiquity and Altered Reality in Medieval Military History,” *Journal of Medieval Military History* 3 (2005): 1–13. Even in works by military practitioners, descriptions of battles were accompanied by numerous *topoi* and cultural factors. See Jon E. Lendon, “The rhetoric of combat: Greek military theory and Roman culture in Julius Caesar’s battle descriptions,” *Classical Antiquity* 18/1 (1999): 273–329.
- 88 Ammianus was not the first author with close ties to the army. This work will also refer to two other authors, who predate the established chronological framework. The first one will be Julius Caesar. His writing provides unique insight into the theatre of war, which Caesar was a master of. The other one is Flavius Josephus, whose narrative about the fighting in Judea includes intriguing descriptions of acts of bravery and cowardice that confirm how studies on collective conformity can be applied to ancient armies.
- 89 We should point out that Procopius’s narrative is not completely devoid of literary *topoi*; compare the description of the siege of Rome to Homer’s depiction of the fighting before the walls of Troy. This comparison has been analyzed in: Whately, *Battles and Generals*. For a description of a battle in the work of Procopius see pages 22–34, especially. Also Anthony Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy at the End of Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 62–98. More on Procopius and his times in Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*

since it was written in the 6th century, during a renaissance of theoretical military literature. Other available sources include historical works written by members of the clergy or by Constantinople officials, particularly the work of Theophylact Simocatta; and for the Middle Byzantine Era – the works by Leo the Deacon and John Skylitzes. But it should be emphasized that narrative and prescriptive sources will only serve as supplementary subjects of study;⁹⁰ the focus of analysis will be on treatises on warfare from Late Antiquity.

For the research to be comprehensive, I will also re-examine the equipment of Late Roman soldiers, seeing as the authors of military treatises on numerous occasions emphasized its non-military significance. Armor was to make soldiers feel better and more secure; long plumes on helmets were to make them appear taller; decorations on horse harnesses added splendor to selected units; and banners served as rallying points and evoked a feeling of community.⁹¹ The look of Roman equipment and weapons was also designed to affect the enemy soldiers, to make them feel afraid and inferior to the imperial army. In times of economic crisis, military treatises also gave instructions on how to deploy poorly equipped soldiers, so that to the enemy they seemed better armed than in reality. Understanding the non-military importance of military equipment gave Roman commanders the ability to employ a wide array of stratagems raising the morale of own troops and lowering that of the enemy. In short, what we will demonstrate here will be the deliberate use of elements of psychological warfare.

Military treatises offer us numerous insights: a look into the methods of intimidating an opposing force, blocking the fear of one's own soldiers, motivating your men, suppressing individuality or a look into the functioning of social control mechanisms; but they also grant us the opportunity to understand the

(London – New York: Routledge, 2005), 227–243. A list of publications and research areas in Geoffrey Greatrex, “Perceptions of Procopius in Recent Scholarship,” *Histos* 8 (2014): 76–121.

90 Georgios Chatzelis also pinpointed the problems related to comparative analysis and concluded that Byzantine historians not only used *topoi*, but also knew military treatises and built their narration on these literary works rather than actual events. Therefore, according to Chatzelis, the practicality dogma of treatises should be rejected only through comparison with narrative sources. Georgios Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals as Literary Works and Practical Handbooks: The Case of the Tenth-Century Sylloge Tacticorum* (London – New York: Routledge, 2019), 98–100. Nevertheless, bearing in mind the entire body of sources available to us, we can deem some of the treatises usable. For *Sylloge Tacticorum* see Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 142.

91 To such an extent that when Agrippa Furius threw his u banner into enemy ranks, the legionnaires redoubled their efforts in the assault to retrieve it. Frontinus, 2. 8. 2, similarly 2. 8. 3. Sulla, on the other hand, supposedly grasped the banner and charged the enemy during an overall retreat, thus shaming his own men. Frontinus, 2. 8. 12; Polyaeus, 8. 9. 2.

whole oppressive system that turned regular people into warriors. With this type of research, we should reject the classic image of the soldier as simply an element in the Roman military machine. Any Roman legionary standing in the ranks about to face an enemy charge was simply a human being; granted, it was a human being that had undergone rigorous training aimed at automating reactions, blocking fear and specific conformist instincts, but a regular human being nonetheless. Commanding officers knew the implications of this fact, and in order to achieve victory had to manage the behavior of their subordinates so that each soldier was willing to risk his life, convinced of his superiority over the enemy – if not physical, then at least mental, moral or religious.

Military treatises supplemented with narrative sources can bring us closer to understanding the mechanisms of army operations developed by the Romans; but they can also shed light on the figure of the soldier on the battlefield. Adopting the research methodology of new military history, particularly that of social psychology, in the study of the battlefield and the army yields excellent results. It enables us to identify the mechanisms that govern the behavior of soldiers and, what is more, to pinpoint which of these were deliberately used by commanders to ensure better results. I believe this is the only way to gain an in-depth look into the situation of the soldier of Antiquity on the field of battle. This will be done through an analysis of sources, supported by comparative analysis. Elements of new military history, mainly social psychology, will also play an auxiliary role.

Since the author of this book is a Polish academic, the bibliography will include items in official congress languages, as well as works by Polish scholars, especially pieces related to battlefield psychology and social psychology. The achievements of Polish academics in these fields are quite significant, but often overlooked in broader academic discussion, due to the language barrier.

This work is a history book, which means it is based on an analysis of sources in their original languages. For the reader's convenience the main text will include translations, with the original version found in the footnotes. All translations from Greek and Latin were made by myself. The preparation of new translations was necessary due to the nature of this work, which focuses on completely novel subjects of study.

One concept will be referred to frequently throughout the work – the concept of the stressor, introduced and measured by two notable scholars of the subject: Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe.⁹² Although their research and conclusions cannot be directly translated to the period and subject of our

92 Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe, "The Social Readjustment Rating Scale," *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 11 (1967): 213–218. We need to remember that this scale is largely dependent on the type of questions that were asked.

study, by the use of analogy and, later, more detailed studies on stressors, we can make great gains in our quest to understand the Roman soldier on the battlefield. Obviously, any conclusions derived from such studies should be treated with caution, due to the high risk of revisionism, i.e. uncritically transposing today's knowledge and experiences to ancient times. This is particularly dangerous for our specified period of study, since we do not have suitable narrative sources that would allow us to carry out more detailed analyses, much less so comparative analyses.⁹³

4 Issues of Methodology and Interpretation

Are we able to follow the mechanism of motivating an army and arousing terror? Did the enemy consciously try to scare Roman legionnaires, and if so, in what ways? Did ancient commanders⁹⁴ attempt to harness the feeling of fear, which in skilled hands could become a powerful tool of war and a motivating factor? And if they did, was that deliberate or were they simply following their own intuitive, automatic responses? And finally, in this grand puzzle, what was the importance of the intricate spectacle of war, where the commander was the main actor, and his soldiers and opponents served as the audience? These are some of the questions asked by new military history, which thanks to modern research methods we may now attempt to answer.

Every scholar of the past is aware that zeroing in on the thoughts and feelings of people living in Antiquity is difficult, and often simply impossible. Moreover, in the absence of really explicit sources the historian must resort to critical speculation. By using analogy, we can surmise what was felt by a legionnaire facing terrifying barbarian hordes with sword in hand⁹⁵ and his companions

93 Suprakash Chaudhury, et al. "Quantification of stressful life events in service personnel," *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 43/3 (2001): 213–218; Suprakash Chaudhury, et al. "A Life Events Scale for Armed Forces personnel," *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* 48/3 (2006): 165–176. Similar research was carried out for the US Army by major Thad Krasnesky, although he only dealt with peacetime service and functioning of the army as a social group. Thad Krasnesky, *Systemic Stress: The Army Lifestyle through the Social Readjustment Scale Lens* (New York: Defense Technical Information Center, 2010).

94 On contemporary ideas on leadership in the context of social psychology, see: Jan Borkowski, *Podstawy psychologii społecznej* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1957), 136–151; Martin Chemers, "Leadership Effectiveness: An Integrative Review," in *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Group Processes*, ed. Michael A. Hogg and Scott Tindale (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 376–399.

95 Compare, e.g. to contemporary military instructions on bayonet combat training: *Instrukcja walki bagnetem (tymczasowa)*. Warszawa: Ministerstwo Spraw Wojskowych, 1925; *Instrukcja walki bagnetem*. Wielka Brytania: Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej, 1943.

from the *contubernium* by his side; but all this will be merely speculation. It is hard to account for all the cultural or religious factors. Also, overly trusting analogies is equally inaccurate, too often leading to false conclusions and revisionism.⁹⁶ But thanks to social psychology, new military history and many other fields of study we can attempt to understand the factors that determined specific soldier behavior. For example, let us consider *mêlée* combat, which was one of the most terrifying experiences for any soldier. The history of man is filled with descriptions of grand duels⁹⁷ – Achilles versus Hector, or David versus Goliath – but it is rather Homer's description of the death of Alcathous, whose dying, twitching body shook the shaft of the spear embedded in his breastplate, that actually captures the horror of close combat.⁹⁸ At close quarters, a soldier has to stand face to face with the enemy, endure the mental and physical pressure, and survive by killing his opponent. The feelings associated with this process can not have changed much, especially considering the course of many battles of Late Antiquity, which frequently ended with one side panicking and fleeing once its morale had been broken.⁹⁹ But, to return to the main point – any person in a close combat situation, regardless of historical period, would have only one thing on their mind – to kill the enemy, or face being killed in turn.¹⁰⁰ Some people, confronted with the extreme conditions of combat, react according to their natural defense mechanisms, either hiding behind their shield or using other available opportunities to avoid actual fighting.¹⁰¹ In the 20th century, the author of a manual on bayonet combat had this to say about hand-to-hand fighting:

96 The dangers of source analysis in the context of new military history were defined in an excellent piece by: Lee, "Morale and the Roman Experience of Battle," 199. who emphasized that the results of studies on "morale and mental toughness" in Antiquity are worth taking certain scientific risks for.

97 In the 11th century, Randolf the Frank was an ideal image of a duelist who roamed the battlefield looking for opponents he could duel with. Skylitzes, 494–495.

98 Iliad, 13, 290–295.

99 The psychological basis for this behavior has been described in works commissioned by the Polish Armed Forces: Stanisław Konieczny, *Strach i odwaga w działaniach bojowych* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1964); Stanisław Konieczny, *Panika wojenna* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1969).

100 See on the basics of hand-to-hand combat in the US Army: *U.S. Army Hand-To-Hand Combat* (New York: Skyhorse, 2012), 4–5.

101 The mechanism of avoiding or simulating combat has been thoroughly researched for modern times. One of the factors related to such "fake" combat is being in a firefight and focusing solely on the number of rounds shot. See: Samuel Lyman Atwood Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), 50–63.

The bayonet has been and will remain the last, but in mental terms the most effective weapon of an infantryman in close-quarters ... a soldier is expected to get close to the enemy and break his resistance with bayonet or skill in hand to hand combat.¹⁰²

History includes numerous examples of bayonet charges¹⁰³ that allowed the charging side to break the spirit of numerically superior defenders and force them to retreat.¹⁰⁴ It is worth noting that the attackers would normally attempt to enhance the terrifying effect of the charge through war cries,¹⁰⁵ music¹⁰⁶ and the unwavering demeanor of the officers leading the attack.¹⁰⁷ It would be inappropriate to dismiss such stratagems as simple battlefield theatrics, because very often it really was the shouting and the belligerent attitude of

102 *Instrukcja walki bagnetem*, 5. *Ostatnim i pod względem psychicznym najsilniejszym argumentem piechura w walce na najbliższych odległościach jest i pozostanie – bagnet ... żołnierz musi dążyć do starcia wręcz i złamania oporu przeciwnika bagnetem lub walką pierś o pierś.*

103 Philip Sabin also pinpointed the similarity between a bayonet attack and ancient war. Sabin, "The Face of Roman Battle," 13.

104 Examples of successful bayonet charges that broke the enemy are numerous; the fight for Little Round Top during the Battle of Gettysburg; or the probably most extraordinary assault in the history of close-combat fighting when the 65th Infantry Regiment (The Borinqueneers) of the 3rd US division charged a whole Chinese division during the War in Korea, which resulted in the death of nearly 6,000 defenders and the capture of a further 2,000; or the recent bayonet clash by the British Prince of Wales' Royal Regiment, which took place on 14 May 2004 in Iraq. In each of these examples the prospect of imminent hand-to-hand combat and the resolve of the assaulting side led to them achieving a spectacular success.

105 The effectiveness of battle cries during a clash was mentioned, e.g. by Vegetius: Veg. 3. 18. This aspect will be described comprehensively in further sections of the work.

106 Music has been a staple of military fighting for hundreds of years; evidence can be found on the pages of the Old Testament or in the famous War Scroll. For the Israelites, music was supposed to hold great power; it caused ecstasy, accompanied prophecies, or even destroyed city walls. See: Joachim Braun, *Music in Ancient Israel/Palestine: Archaeological, Written, and Comparative Sources* (Cambridge: Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 113–119; Terence C. Mitchell, "The Music of the Old Testament Reconsidered," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 124 (1992): 124–143; Yigael Yadin, *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light against the Sons of Darkness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962). The beginnings of military music were briefly described in the classic work by Henry George Farmer, *The Rise and Development of Military Music* (London: Reeves, 1882), 1–11.

107 The attitude of the commanding officer is one of the most crucial factors on the battlefield. See, e.g.: Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army at War*, 145–149; Loreto, "Il generale e la Biblioteca," 563–589. On the psychology of managing small groups, see Fred Fiedler, "The Contingency Model: A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness," in *Small Groups Key Readings*, ed. John M. Levine and Richard L. Moreland (New York & Hove: Psychology Press, 2006), 369–382.

the enemy that caused one of the sides to retreat without a fight.¹⁰⁸ We should also remember that close combat did not usually result in heavy casualties.¹⁰⁹ It was only in the final stages of each battle, i.e. during the pursuit of fleeing forces, that the losing side would be massacred. This can be explained in several ways. First of all, fleeing soldiers lose any interest in fighting or even defending themselves. All heavy pieces of equipment, such as shields, were normally discarded, so as not to slow the men down.¹¹⁰ A panicking mob¹¹¹ is much more dangerous than an individual – innate human conformity and the instinct for self-preservation lead people to focus solely on getting as far away from danger as possible, without regard for their surroundings or brothers in arms. The result is that often even the units that were determined to continue fighting would be disrupted or swept away by the wave of retreating men,¹¹² and fleeing soldiers would lose their lives by drowning or falling off heights. These are instinctive herd-like behaviors. The accounts of ancient chroniclers are filled with mentions of routed troops who died while crossing rivers or swamps¹¹³ or chose to jump off a cliff.¹¹⁴ It is completely illogical from the point of view of a single human being, but based on the observations of social psychologists,¹¹⁵ mob logic is different from that of the individual and is governed by conformity and fear. This makes terror an immensely effective

108 Compare Tacitus's description of a Germanic war cry: *They mostly emit harsh tones and an intermittent murmur, and they hold their shields close to their mouths, whereby the voice, bouncing of the shields, rises in strength, becoming fuller and deeper.* Tacitus, *De origine et situ Germanorum*, 3–4.

109 This is related to wanting to protect one's life. Any soldier equipped with a shield will primarily attempt to ensure safety by staying behind it. Actively engaging the opponent, which requires much bravery, will not be a priority.

110 Soldiers of the Roman army could expect strict punishment for discarding their shield: *Some of them, having lost their shield, sword or other piece of weaponry, would throw themselves madly at the enemy hoping to reclaim their gear or at the least, by dying, to avoid the shame and abuse of their comrades.* Polybios, 6. 37–38.

111 The term “mob” is used by the author to signify a group of people galvanized into action. Stefan Baley, *Wprowadzenie do psychologii społecznej* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1959), 127; Andranik Akopov and Levon A. Beklaryan. “Simulation of human crowd behavior in extreme situations,” *International Journal of Pure and Applied Mathematics* 79/1 (2012): 121–138.

112 This happened, for example, at the Battle of Manzikert in 1071. Nikeforos Bryennios, 1. 17–18 and Attaliates, 20. 23–24.

113 See: Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 16. 55–56.

114 See: *Theophylacti Simocattae historiae*, ed. Carolus de Boor and Peter Wirth, De Gruyter: Stutgardiae, 1972. 1. 12. 1–8. Further referred to as: Sym.

115 See particularly the classical work by Harold Kelley and John W. Thibaut. *The Social Psychology of Groups* (London – New York: Wiley, 2017).

weapon of war,¹¹⁶ scattering or even destroying an enemy force. All one needs is to make them afraid and wait for the inevitable result – panic.

Roman legionnaires did not write memoirs, and all the great historians, rather than focusing on fear, were more interested in glorious victories, disheartening defeats and their principal architects.¹¹⁷ This is not to say that we have no means of delving into the psyche of ancient soldiers, but it does mean that the process is both complicated and very risky.¹¹⁸ Any scholar seeking to at least partially understand these soldiers' attitudes to battlefield terrors must look for information beyond the monumental works of ancient historiography.¹¹⁹ Military treatises comprise a group of sources that may prove very useful in this regard, as they were often written by practitioners with field

116 See, for example, how Seleukos Nikator defeated the opposing army without bloodshed: Polyaeus, 4. 9. 3.

117 What is more, usually in the accounts of battles the historians of Antiquity employed conventional descriptions, which often had little to do with reality. This was the case even for historians who were also soldiers or those with ties to the army. See the fascinating research by Dariusz Brodka: "Zum Wahrheitsbegriff in den *Bella* des Prokopios von Kaisareia," *Klio* 89 (2007): 465–476; Dariusz Brodka, "Attila, Tyche und die Schlacht auf den Katalaunischen Feldern. Eine Untersuchung zum Geschichtsdenken des Priskos von Panion," *Hermes* 136 (2008): 227–245; Brodka, Dariusz. *Ammianus Marcellinus. Studien zum Geschichtsdenken im 4. Jahrhundert n. Chr* (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2009).

118 On the topic of battlefield stress, but mostly the issue of post-traumatic stress disorder among Roman veterans, see: Melchior, "Caesar in Vietnam," 209–223. Not all attempts at applying a contemporary context and seeking analogies are successful. One of the worst examples is comparing heavy medieval cavalry to tanks and studying both weapon types as similar; studies of this sort were conducted, among others, by: Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009), 393–409.

119 See the classic work: Charles Ardant Du Picq, *Études sur le combat* (Paris: Hachette, 1880). or the study that is crucial for modern methodology of military history: Keegan, *The Face of Battle*. One of the men who implemented Keegan's theses was A.K. Goldsworthy, in his many publications. We also must not forget the work prepared for the U.S. Army by Marshall, which was the first to highlight the practical importance of psychology in military operations. Marshall, *Men against Fire*. But the first author to deal with the psychology of war was: William James, *The Moral Equivalent of War* (New York: Read Books, 2013) who sought positive aspects of war in a social context. In the field of methodology, it is worth mentioning the fundamental collection on the deconstruction of sources, which is the method commonly used by scholars following the trends of new military history: Geoffrey Hartman, Paul de Man, Harold Bloom and Jacques Derrida. *Deconstruction & Criticism*. New York: Routledge, 1979. Among Polish scholars Ireneusz Łuć successfully introduced new methods to studies on social functions in the Roman army. See: Ireneusz Łuć, *Boni et Mali Milites Romani. Relacje między żołnierzami wojsk rzymskich w okresie Wczesnego Cesarstwa* (Toruń: Avalon, 2010). This one is worth comparing with more classic works, for example: MacMullen, "The Legion as a Society," 440–456. or with a broader

experience¹²⁰ and quite extensive theoretical knowledge,¹²¹ which was the result of many centuries of evolution of warfare in the Greco-Roman world. This gives us a category of sources on the basis of which we may attempt to build a more comprehensive narrative. But we must at all times bear in mind that such studies carry a high risk of putting too much emphasis on analogies. This is why the source material should be the focus of critical study, and any analogies and new research methods should only be employed to paint a fuller picture.

5 Sources

5.1 *Military Treatises as a Separate Category of Sources*

The development of tactics and technological advances in Antiquity forced commanders to study the achievements of their predecessors. Changes were mostly related to tactics and the doctrines of using the available weaponry, with some ideas often becoming viable once again after hundreds of years.¹²² Rome never developed a unified system of training for its commanding officers. In the early republican period, every aristocrat worth his salt, before assuming command over a military unit, would have already had practical experience derived from their years of service in cavalry formations,¹²³ but this changed before the establishment of the Principate.¹²⁴ Some future military leaders also

methodological perspective, which identifies further avenues of study, in the work: Fagan and Trundle ed. *New Perspectives on Ancient Warfare*.

120 An analysis of Roman military treatises is a possible solution to the issue that plagues historiographic works of Antiquity, which often repeat the same schematic descriptions of battles. Doug Lee, *A. War in late Antiquity. A Social History* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 126–133.

121 As noticed by Kaegi Jr., the mixture of military literature with the experiences of past conflicts led to the emergence of a unique way of waging war in the Empire, which did not appear *ex nihilo*, but evolved from Greek and Roman treatises. Kaegi, Walter Emil. Jr. “Some Thoughts on Byzantine Military Strategy,” in *Byzantine Warfare*, ed. John Haldon (Aldershot: Routledge 2007), 260–261.

122 E.g. a tight formation of spearmen, heavily reminiscent of the Greek phalanx, came back into use in Late Antiquity, with added elements of a Germanic shield-wall. Philip Rance, “The Fulcum, the Late Roman and Byzantine Testudo: the Germanization of Roman Infantry Tactics?” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 44 (2004): 265–326.

123 The system was briefly described by: Myles McDonnell, *Roman Manliness: Virtus and the Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 247.

124 See: Claude Nicolet, “Armee et Societe a Rome sous la Republique: a prop os de l’Ordre equestre,” in *Problèmes de la guerre à Rome*, ed. Jean-Paul Brisson (Paris: De Gruyter, 1970), 117–156.

received careful theoretical tutelage at home,¹²⁵ or during *tirocinium militiae*. Young officers were rarely given their own command immediately; prior to that they would serve an auxiliary role in military staffs, or as members of military councils (*consilium*). This allowed them to learn through observation. However, this system was not always sufficient, and the element of self-improvement was an important factor, especially in Late Antiquity, where armies would sometimes be led by people without extensive military experience, but rather with the proper connections at the imperial court.¹²⁶

Due to the lack of a unified military education system and the difficulties in acquiring practical military knowledge, a new solution had to be found. This led to the emergence of military treatises.¹²⁷ Army commanders and keen observers of the realities of warfare decided to write down their experiences and observations for future generations of leaders. This was pro-state writing, and most authors were aware of this fact, both in Antiquity as well as in the Middle Ages.¹²⁸ But such literature does have certain crucial limitations.¹²⁹ The majority of authors would employ the same schematic descriptions, bordering on the use of literary *topoi*. This was due to the very slow evolution in army tactics and equipment, which made it necessary for a large section of any treatise to present a state of warfare that had remained unchanged for centuries.¹³⁰ Another thing to bear in mind was the authority of the great leaders of the past, which the authors of later military treatises would gladly share in.¹³¹

125 This remained true even in the Middle Ages, when learning strategy at home was still a normal practice. Sullivan, "Byzantine Military Manuals," 149. In the opinion of D. Sullivan, military treatises were an excellent addition to this home tutoring system.

126 One prominent example would be the future emperor – Maurice, who probably did not have any military experience before assuming the function of *magister militum per Orientem*.

127 According to the definition, the word treatise (*tractatus*) denotes an extensive dissertation on the primary aspects of a given field of knowledge.

128 We only need to compare the introductory sections of Vegetius's work, *Strategikon* or the first chapters of the work of Syrianus Magister or *De velitatione bellica* to see that the authors wrote for the benefit of future generations of leaders and their country. In each of these works it is evident that the writers have a deep concern for their homeland (but obviously each also had their own personal agenda to pursue when writing their treatise).

129 For the differences between theory and practice on the Roman battlefield see especially Taxiarchis Koliass, "Η πολεμική τακτική των Βυζαντινών: Θεωρία και πράξη," in *Το εμπόλεμο Βυζάντιο (9ος–12ος αι.) | Byzantium at War (9th–12th c.)*, ed. Kostas Tsiknakis (Athens: Goulandri-Horn Foundation, 1997), 153–164.

130 This aspect is highlighted also by Georgios Chatzelis who adopted a similar attitude to the slow changes in the Middle Byzantine military science. See Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 92.

131 This would reinforce the authority of the writer who used and copied a work that was considered important, and at the same time would present that writer as being erudite.

Any commander compiling his own manual would include the wisdom of past generations of army leaders, who had led forces on countless battlefields. Usually based on their own experience, the authors added a number of new stratagems that they had devised themselves, and the rest of the work was a recapitulation of the accepted truths of waging war. It was natural to copy fragments of previous works, especially if their authors were universally respected.¹³² Compiling a section of a theoretical piece written by an established *strategos* was not something frowned upon – on the contrary, referring back to the authority of a valued commander elevated the rest of the work in the eyes of the readers. The process of writing a treatise, which was supposed to be a utilitarian piece, demanded that the author have vast knowledge, both theoretical and practical. As a rule, authors would use those sections of past works that were still relevant, and supplement these with their own ideas, stratagems, ruses and ruminations. The finished treatise would thus be highly applicable, although most of its contents did not stem from the experience of the author, but rather previous generations of tacticians and *strategoí*.¹³³ However, the greatest strength of military treatises, that is preserving and sharing the experiences of countless past commanders, could just as well have become the greatest threat to military literature as a whole. It was easy to lose the sense of proportions of the text, meaning that content copied from past works could easily fill a whole treatise. The piece could still be relevant, but was devoid of the author's input, making him merely a compiler. The situation was different still when a text was prepared by someone without military knowledge – in such case the work ceased to be applicable and became nothing more than a period piece, often without much practical use for the reader. Another thing that had a bearing on the contents was the use of literary *topoi*, which were employed both by authors with actual military experience, as well as by those who did not have any.¹³⁴ It is rather ironic that most of the military treatises that are available today are compilations of the works of

On the complexity of the emergence of the treatise, and antiquarian elements and their role in treatises, see also Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 88–94.

132 This is partially confirmed by a prominent historian of Byzantine literature, Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur*, 635–636; Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 94–98.

133 Of course, the authors may have also used these during their own military career.

134 Kaegi Jr., “Some Thoughts on Byzantine Military Strategy,” 260–261. Sometimes, an analysis of the language also posed a problem. In the Middle Ages, copying Latin military terminology was very popular in order to show one's erudition. As a result, a contemporary reader who is not vigilant enough will be led to believe the Roman *testudo* formation was still employed on 11th century battlefields. See more in Abels, Morillo, “A Lying Legacy?” 1–13.

great leaders,¹³⁵ which themselves have not survived in their original forms.¹³⁶ The readers of treatises naturally included various echelons of military commanders, intellectuals dealing with the theory of war and sometimes emperors heading their armies, fighting with the enemies of the state.¹³⁷ It should also be noted that the readership of military treatises could include civilians, for whom it was an excellent source of information on the army and, in the opinion of Conor Whately, entertainment as well.¹³⁸

Scholars have been trying to categorize the genre of military treatises for a while now. The most successful attempt was made by Eric McGeer, who suggested the following breakdown: works focusing on tactics and technical jargon (*taktika*), strategy and command (*strategika*), siegecraft (*poliorketika*), naval battles (*naumachiai*), rhetoric (*paraggelmata*) and strategems (*strategemata*).¹³⁹ A similar division can also be found in Sullivan's work.¹⁴⁰ Unfortunately, these sub-genres often overlap, which makes precise categorization impossible. But it is a fact that the authors of Antiquity were aware of specialist roles in the army, which is confirmed by the existence of different

135 From the work of Aelianus Tacticus we know that the following people have written their own military treatises: Pyrrhus and his son, Alexander, Pausanias, Clearchus, Evangelios, Polybius of Megalopolis, Eupolemus, and Posidonius. The knowledge contained in these treatises can only be attempted to be reconstructed by looking at the work of Aelianus, who collected and compiled the works of the aforementioned authors. Aelianus Tacticus, 1.

136 I see no point in presenting a history of military literature, as this had already been done before World War II by: Oliver Jr. Spaulding, "The Ancient Military Writers," *The Classical Journal* 28/9 (1933): 657–669. The history of Byzantine military treatises was described, successively, by: Dain and de Foucault, "Les Stratégistes byzantins," 317–392; esp. p. 319–336; Loreto, "Il generale e la Biblioteca" 563–589 and Vladimir Vasilievich Kuchma, "Византийские военные трактаты VI–X вв. как исторический источник," *Византийский временник* 40 (1979): 49–75.

137 *Constantini Porphyrogeniti tres tractatus de expeditionibus militaribus imperatoris*, (C) 196–206. There is also a short list of treatises that a ruler should have with him during a campaign. Two authors were named: Syrianus and Polyaeus.

138 Conor Whately, "The Genre and Purpose of Military Manuals In Late Antiquity," in *Shifting Genres in Late Antiquity*, ed Geoffrey Greatrex, Hugh Elton (London: Routledge, 2015), 260–1. However, it is difficult to verify the hypothesis about the treatises being seen as entertainment; especially since the elites in Late Antiquity treated the army rather as a necessary evil, showing little interest in warfare as a field of study.

139 See more in: Eric McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth. Byzantine Warfare In the Tenth Century* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2008), 171. And also: Sullivan, "Byzantine Military Manuals," 149–161. For additional information on vocabulary related to military stratagems, consult: Everett L. Wheeler, *Stratagem and the Vocabulary of Military Trickery* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), especially pages 25–49 on the Greek vocabulary, and 50–92 on the Latin vocabulary related to war stratagems.

140 Sullivan, "Byzantine Military Manuals," 149–161.

sub-types of military treatises. We only need to mention two of these: *poliorketika* and *naumachika*, as they were dedicated to a very narrow group of readers, that is combat engineers and naval commanders. In the case of treatises on siegecraft, the knowledge they contained was mostly about the technical aspects necessary for the actual builders of siege machines, but irrelevant to the commander, who only had to know how to use siege engines, not construct them. This is why *poliorketika* include minute details about the construction of engines of war, settings, tension values, even suggestions about what materials to use;¹⁴¹ whereas *strategika* rather contain knowledge about how to use the finished product in combat. Some authors, both from modern times¹⁴² and those from Antiquity, identified war machines as a separate field of study. For example, Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, who in an appendix to *De Ceremoniis*¹⁴³ listed books on leadership (βιβλία στρατηγικά), books on war machines (βιβλία μηχανικά) and works on artillery (βελοποιϊκά). A similar confirmation can be found in the 10th-century *De Re Militari*,¹⁴⁴ where the author refers his readers to works on siegecraft as a separate category.

The primary category of sources analyzed herein will comprise late Roman military treatises dedicated to army commanders (στρατηγικά).¹⁴⁵ This is a unique genre of Roman literature, with its own set of rules, often difficult to interpret, riddled with literary *topoi* and anachronistic, antiquarian terms.¹⁴⁶ The principal theoretical works used in Late Antiquity were the works of Aelianus Tacticus on terminology and tactics, Heron's on siegecraft, Frontinus's on military stratagems and the work of Onasander on leadership.¹⁴⁷ This makes

141 See for example the instructions of Apollodorus Mechanicus on the construction of battering rams: Apollodorus Mechanicus, Πολιορκητικά, 159–162.

142 Philip Rance, "Introduction," in *Greek Taktika. Ancient Military Writing and its Heritage*, ed. Philip Rance, Nicholas Sekunda (Gdańsk: Akanthina, 2017), 12.

143 *De Ceremoniis*, R467; HC193.

144 *Byzantini liber De Re Militari*, 27.

145 Alexander Kazhdan ed. *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1962.

146 See, particularly: Gilbert Dagron and Haralambie Mihăescu ed. *Le Traité sur la guérilla de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1986), 139–141.

147 Please refer to, especially: Herbert Hunger, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner* (München: Beck, 1977), 323–331; *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1962 and an classic piece by K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur*, 635–636. Georgios Chatzelis juxtaposed in an interesting way the works of authors of military treatises with ancient texts and concluded that, in many places, the author of *Sylloge Tacticorum* only supplemented the ancient stratagems included in the military treatises with Christian elements, or ones more familiar to Byzantine readers. Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 75–76. This only confirms the fact that some rules of war in Antiquity and the Middle Ages practically did not change.

military treatises difficult to analyze as a source, and the interpretation of any knowledge found within is always partially an antiquarian effort. Despite these shortcomings, this is the only category of sources that will allow us to achieve the designated research goals. No other source can provide an in-depth look into how commanders treated their soldiers or grant insight into the usually inaccessible elements of the theatre of war. Military treatises were frequently written by army men for the benefit of other army men, which gives us the opportunity to study the theory of command from the perspective of actual field commanders.¹⁴⁸ In many cases, the applicability of these suggestions and stratagems remains an open question, although it is not one that will be answered in this book.¹⁴⁹

5.2 De Re Militari

The work of Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus, *De Re Militari* or *Epitoma rei militaris*, is one of the best-researched military treatises, and its influence on the warcraft of Middle Ages¹⁵⁰ and even modern times was tremendous.¹⁵¹ It was written in the Latin-speaking West, and its author was Christian. *Terminus post quem* for the work is determined by the following statement of the author: *Ab urbe enim condita usque ad tempus divi Gratiani et catafractis et galeis muni-ebatur pedestris exercitus*.¹⁵² This means that Vegetius must have composed the treatise after the death of Emperor Gratian in 383, as evidenced by the phrase *divi Gratiani*. The first edition of *De Re Militari* was probably published around

148 See for example the way in which ancient stratagems were used by Alexios Komnenos: Theocharis Alexopoulos, "Using Ancient Military Handbooks to fight Medieval Battles: Two stratagems used by Alexios I Comnenos against the Normans and the Pechenegs," *Eoa kai Esperia* 8 (2012): 47–71.

149 I have written about the antiquarian features of *Strategikon* in: Łukasz Różycki, *Mauricii Strategicon. Praktyczny podręcznik wojskowy i dzieło antykwaryczne* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2015).

150 See for example Stephen Morillo. "Battle Seeking: The Contexts and Limits of Vegetian Strategy," *Journal of Medieval Military History* 1 (2002): 21–42.

151 On the importance of Vegetius's work in the Middle Ages, see: Christopher Allmand, "The De Re Militari of Vegetius in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance," in *Writing War Medieval Literary Responses to Warfare*, ed. Corinne Saunders, Françoise Le Saux and Neil Thomas (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), 15–29. Pierre Riché suggests that Rabanus Maurus knew the treatise and presented it to Lothair I. See Pierre Riché, *Écoles et enseignement dans le Haute Moyen Age. Fin du V^e siècle – milieu du XI^e siècle* (Paris: Picard, 1989), 302. Briefly also in Cosentino, "Writing about war in Byzantium," 83–84. More comprehensively in: Christopher Allmand, *The de Re Militari of Vegetius: The Reception, Transmission and Legacy of a Roman Text in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

152 Veg. 1. 20.

390 during the reign of Theodosius I, but we do know that the work was revised and republished in the times of Valentinian III (425–455). The treatise lacks any clues that would allow us to unequivocally determine *terminus ante quem*, so scholars are still discussing the date of creation of the work.¹⁵³

On the subject of the author, we cannot say anything beyond what Vegetius reveals about himself in *De Re Militari*. We know that he was not a member of the army – which means that most of his knowledge was derived from reading previous works on the theory of warfare, supplemented with own observations and insights. *De Re Militari* contains many sections that can be seen as period pieces, copied from other theoretical works, including lost military treatises from the period of the late Roman republic. This makes it difficult to interpret the piece and forces any scholar attempting this to verify if selected fragments are not outdated when applied to the state of the army in the 6th century. The treatise by Vegetius was partially moralistic;¹⁵⁴ the author advocated a return to Roman virtues and restoring the previously prominent role of heavy legionary infantry.¹⁵⁵ Although the moral angle is one of the distinctive features of

153 On the dating of Vegetius's work, see: Michael Charles, *Vegetius in Context Establishing the Date of the Epitoma Rei Militaris* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007); Walter Goffart, "The Date and Purpose of Vegetius' *De Re Militari*," *Traditio* 33 (1977): 69–88; Timothy Barnes, "The Date of Vegetius," *Phoenix* 33/3 (1979): 254–257.

154 *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1962. Compare the introductions to *De Re Militari*, the works of Syrianus Magister, *Strategikon* or even *Tactica*. Moralizing passages appear in all of them, and every author claims that their treatise is the only solution to the supposed crisis in the army. Pat Southern mentioned it as well; in her opinion, Vegetius' goal was not so much to present a realistic Roman army, but rather an idealized model of one, based on the works of earlier theoreticians. Pat Southern, *The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 30.

155 See the introduction to Book II. *Instituta maiorum partis armatae plenissime clementiam uestram peritissimeque retinere continuis declaratur uictoribus ac triumphis, siquidem indubitata adprobatio artis sit rerum semper effectus. Verum tranquillitas tua, imperator inuicte, altiori consilio, quam mens poterat terrena concipere, ex libris antiqua desiderat, cum ipsiam antiquitatem factis recentibus antecedit. Igitur cum haec litteris breuiter comprehendere maiestati uestrae non tam discenda quam recognoscenda praeciperer, certauit saepius deuotio cum pudore. Quid enim audacius, quam domino ac principi generis humani, domitori omnium gentium barbararum, aliquid de usu ac disciplina insinuare bellorum, nisi forte iussisset fieri, quod ipse gessisset? et rursus tanti imperatoris non oboedire mandatis plenum sacrilegii uidebatur atque periculi. Miro itaque more in parendo audax factus sum, dum metuo uideri audacior, si negassem. Ad quam temeritatem praecedens me indulgentia uestrae perennitatis anaimauit. Nam libellum de dilectu atque exercitatione tironum dudum tamquam famulus obtuli; non tamen culpatus abscessi. Nec formido iussus adgredi opus, quod spontaneum cessit impune.* The author was faced with a true conundrum; at times praising the emperor as the best tactician, but on the other hand wishing for the return of the Roman legions of old. The solution was simple: to describe the ruler as someone who puts into practice the instructions found in the treatise ("it is obviously not my intention to

military treatises as a genre, in the case of Vegetius it unfortunately led to certain important elements of the army being wilfully understated, or at times evidently ignored by the author.¹⁵⁶

Despite the above, *De Re Militari* is a valuable source considering the subject of my work. Vegetius frequently focused on aspects of the theatre of war and methods of suppressing fear that are relevant to this study, whereas tactics, strategy and equipment were to a certain extent treated as secondary in importance. This was likely due to his limited military experience. But thanks to this attitude any anachronistic passages in Vegetius's work will not present an issue for this analysis. *De Re Militari* was most likely not read by Syrianus;¹⁵⁷ however, the author of *Strategikon* did know of it and did use it in his own treatise. This is particularly notable in the case of the military maxims which are repeated in both works.¹⁵⁸

5.3 De Re Strategica

De Re Strategica (Περὶ Στρατηγικῆς) by Syrianus Magister, until recently considered to be an anonymous source, is less popular than Vegetius' work or *Strategikon*. Syrianus Magister authored three military treatises which have survived until our times. In this analysis, *De Re Strategica* will be of greatest importance, although the work about war at sea (*Naumachiai*)¹⁵⁹ will also be mentioned together with a short treatise about speeches delivered by commanders.¹⁶⁰ For a long time, *De Re Strategica* was believed to be an

lecture Your Imperial Majesty about the glory of the past, rather to remind You of Your own". Thus, the Emperor would not feel admonished by Vegetius, which could have ended badly for the Roman author.

- 156 This sentiment is clearly seen on the example of the cavalry, particularly armored formations. Vegetius ignored the existence of heavy cavalry, which in the 6th century was already a force to be reckoned with on the battlefield. Compare: Veg. 3. 23 with the Battle of Argentoratum, especially: Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 16. 12. 36–41. Concerning sources dealing with Roman cavalry, see also: Karen Ramsey Dixon and Pat Southern. *The Roman Cavalry: From the First to the Third Century AD* (London: Barnes & Noble, 1992), 11–19, especially 11–16.
- 157 Incidental similarities between the two works should be explained by both authors using similar sources; we have no clues suggesting that one of the authors copied the other, even indirectly.
- 158 See: Różycki, *Mauricii Strategicon*, 178–189.
- 159 Syrianos Magistros, *Ναυμαχίαι Συριανοῦ Μαγίστρου* ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys and John Pryor, in: *The Age of the Δρομον. The Byzantine Navy ca. 500–1204* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 455–483. Further referred to as *Naumachiai*.
- 160 See Hermann August Theodor Köchly ed. *Anonymi Byzantini Rhetorica militaris* (Turici: Ex officina Zürcheri et Furreri, 1855), 3–18. Further referred to as *Byzantini Rhetorica*. And the Italian translation: Immacolata Eramo ed. *Siriano Discorsi di Guerra* (Bari: Dedalo,

anonymous treatise, yet Constantine Zuckerman¹⁶¹ established that the author was Syrianus Magister. Syrianus,¹⁶² similarly to Vegetius, probably did not have practical military experience, learning from observation and by reading. *De Re Strategica* was extensively researched by Vladimir Vasilevich Kuchma.¹⁶³ This Russian historian strongly emphasized the antiquarian passages in Syrianus's work, and the author's frequent calls to restore the greatness of the army based on the experiences of Greek *poleis* of Classical Antiquity.¹⁶⁴ Another, also partial analysis was conducted by Franziska E. Shlosser, focusing solely on the characteristics of an ideal commander.¹⁶⁵ The study by Shlosser, although interesting and useful, was based on a classical and heavily idealized image of a *strategos* in the context of Late Antiquity. The work of Syrianus Magister was further analyzed and used in Late Antiquity for its insights on tactics and strategy of Roman forces by numerous scholars writing comprehensive studies on this multifaceted topic.¹⁶⁶ Notably, Syrianus Magister was praised by

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- 2011). An English translation of this interesting piece is currently in the works, prepared by a team consisting of Dimitrios Sidiropoulos and Georgios Theotokis (*Byzantine Military Rhetoric in the Ninth Century: A Translation of the Anonymi Byzantini Rhetorica Militaris*).
- 161 At the beginning of the 1990s, Zuckerman compared two works: *Rhetorica Militaris* and *Naumachiai* with the contents of *De Re Strategica*. It turned out that all three pieces are by the same author, and because *Naumachiai* was signed by Syrianus Magister, he has since then been considered to be the author of all these works. Constantine Zuckerman, "The Compendium of Syrianus Magister," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 40 (1990): 209–224. Zuckerman's research began with the work by: Friedrich Lammert, "Die älteste erhaltene Schrift über Seetaktik und ihre Beziehung zum Anonymus Byzantinus des 6. Jahrhunderts, zu Vegetius und zu Aineias' Strategika," *Klio* 33 (1940): 271–288. in which the author compares information about naval warfare from several other written texts. See also: Philip Rance, "The Date of the Military Compendium of Syrianus Magister (formerly the Sixth-Century Anonymus Byzantinus)," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 100/2 (2007): 714.
- 162 See the whole story in: Zuckerman, "The Compendium of Syrianus Magister," 209–224; Immacolata Eramo, "On Syrianus Magister's military compendium," *Classica & Christiana* 7/1 (2012): 97–100.
- 163 Vladimir Vasilevich Kuchma ed. *О стратегии. Византийский военный трактат VI века* (Saint Petersburg: Litres, 2007), 8; Rance, "The Date of the Military Compendium of Syrianus Magister," 703–707.
- 164 Kuchma, *О стратегии. Византийский военный трактат VI века*, 8.
- 165 Franziska Shlosser, *The Reign of the Emperor Maurikios (582–602): A Reassessment* (Athens: Historical Publications St. D. Basilopoulos. 1994), 79–88. It is a pity that Shlosser did not choose the format of the work suggested by Campbell. The Belfast historian analyzed and compared the works of Onasander and Frontinus. Strong emphasis was put on the features of a good, or rather ideal commander. Campbell, "Teach Yourself How to be a General," 13–29.
- 166 These are the major monographs devoted to the imperial army: Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World*; Philip Sabin, Hans van Wees and Michael Whitby ed.

Constantine Porphyrogenetos who recommended keeping a compendium of the author's work on hand during military campaigns.¹⁶⁷

As the treatise by Syrianus Magister is among the key sources used in this book, the date of its origin needs to be mentioned. Many scholars still consider *De Re Strategica* a source from the 6th century,¹⁶⁸ but the latest studies have shed new light on the work and its likely origins.¹⁶⁹ The treatise has been attributed to the time of Justinian¹⁷⁰ because of the considerable importance

The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare vol. II: Rome from the late Republic to the late Empire (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007); Warren Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army 284–1081* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Taxiarchis Kolias, *Byzantinische Waffen: ein Beitrag zur byzantinischen Waffenkunde von den Anfängen bis zur lateinischen Eroberung* (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1988).

- 167 *Constantini Porphyrogeniti tres tractatus de expeditionibus militaribus imperatoris*, (C) 106. 198–199. Syrianus' work was also mentioned by Nikephoros Ouranos. Friedrich Blass, "Die griechischen und lateinischen Handschriften im alten Serail zu Konstantinopel," *Hermes* 23 (1888): 225; Immacolata Eramo, "On Syrianus Magister's military compendium," *Classica & Christiana* 7/1 (2012): 101–102.
- 168 The latest study by Kuchma still dates the treatise of Syrianus to the end of the Justinian period. Kuchma, *О стратегии. Византийский военный трактат VI века*, 5–51 and for a history of Byzantine warfare: Vladimir Vasilievich Kuchma, *Военная организация Византийской Империи* (Saint Petersburg: Aletheia, 2001), 37. Also: Shlosser, *The Reign of the Emperor Maurikios*, 79–88. Another scholar who supports the dating of Syrianus's work to the times of Justinian, but without giving any arguments, is: Whately, "The Genre and Purpose of Military Manuals In Late Antiquity," 250.
- 169 Salvatore Cosentino, "Syrianos' Strategikon – a 9th-Century Source?," *Byzantinistica* 2 (2000): 243–280; Doug A. Lee and Jonathan Shepard. "A Double Life: Placing the Peri Presbeon," *Byzantinoslavica* 52 (1991): 28–29; Rance, "The Date of the Military Compendium of Syrianus Magister," 701–737; Barry Baldwin, "On the Date of the Anonymous ΠΕΡΙ ΣΤΡΑΤΗΓΙΚΗΣ," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 81 (1988): 290–293 and; Laura Mecella, "Die Überlieferung der Kestoi des Julius Africanus in den byzantinischen Textsammlungen zur Militärtechnik," in *Die Kestoi des Julius Africanus und ihre Überlieferung*, ed. Martin Wallraff and Laura Mecella (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 85–144, and particularly 96–98.
- 170 The period of his reign is quite significant in the context of this book. For a broader historical background, consult: Telemachos Lounges, *Ιουστινιανός Πέτρος Σαββάτιος. Κοινωνία, πολιτική και ιδεολογία τον 6ο μ.Χ. αιώνα* (Thessaloniki: Vanias, 2005); James Allan Stewart Evans, *The age of Justinian: the circumstances of imperial power* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Michael Maas ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Clemens Koehn, *Justinian und die Armee des frühen Byzanz* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018); Hugh Elton, "Army and Battle in the Age of Justinian (527–65)," in *A Companion to the Roman Army*, ed. Paul Erdkamp (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 532–550; Peter Shuvalov, *Секрет армии Юстиниана восточноримская армия в 491–641 гг.* (Saint Petersburg: Petersburg Oriental Studies, 2006); Harry Turtledove, "The true Size of a Post-Justinianic Army," *Byzantine Studies/Etudes Byzantines* 10/2 (1983): 216–222; Doug A. Lee, "The Empire at War," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of*

of archery in *De Re Strategica*, coupled with mentions of Belisarius, one of the most eminent commanders in the first half of the 6th century. The author references the figure of Belisarius, stating that “*this is what Belisarius used to do*” (τοῦτο δ’ ἐποίει καὶ Βελισάριος).¹⁷¹ While Philip Rance is right that Syrianus did not refer to his time but rather an event from the past,¹⁷² the fact remains that Belisarius, a commander from Justinian’s times, is one of the few historical figures referred to by Syrianus.¹⁷³ Interestingly, while Belisarius was a prominent figure in the 6th century, there were not many references to the famous commander’s achievements in the 10th. While dating the work based on a mention of Belisarius is dubious, the treatise cannot be dated by reference to its mention of Arabs, because Syrianus could have meant the Arabs from before Islam.¹⁷⁴ This is also the case with the author’s use of the term *kataphraktoi*¹⁷⁵ in reference to heavy cavalry, which Lee and Shepard regarded as a clear reference to the 10th century, when the term was more generally used.¹⁷⁶ Studies of the part of the treatise dedicated to ruling a country, undertaken by Immacolata

Justinian, ed. Michael Maas, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 113–133; John Teall, “The Barbarians in Justinian’s Armies,” *Speculum* 40 (1965): 294–322.

- 171 Syrianus, 33. 35. In my opinion, the translation by G.T. Dennis’s is excellent despite Baldwin’s reservations. Baldwin, “On the Date of the Anonymous ΠΕΡΙ ΣΤΡΑΤΗΓΙΚΗΣ,” 291.
- 172 Rance, “The Date of the Military Compendium of Syrianus Magister,” 709–710.
- 173 The author also mentioned Cyrus and Hannibal.
- 174 Rance, “The Date of the Military Compendium of Syrianus Magister,” 711–714. Though we should bear in mind that in Late Antiquity the term Ἀραβες was unknown to Roman chroniclers. They preferred to use words signifying individual tribes, or archaic forms such as Σαρακηνοί. See more in: Irfan Shahîd. *Byzantium and the Arabs in the sixth century* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 582–83.
- 175 Mentions about cataphracts were partially cross-analyzed in: Robert Mantle Rattenbury, “An Ancient Armoured Force,” *The Classical Review* 56/3 (1942): 113–116 More on cataphracts in Mariusz Mielczarek, *Cataphracti and Clibanarii Studies on the Heavy Armoured Cavalry of the Ancient World* (Łódź: Oficyna Naukowa MS, 1993). The idea put forward by A. Lee and J. Shepard remains only a curious hypothesis, seeing as the cataphracts were in use throughout the whole late empire period, as evidenced by, e.g. the treatise by Vegetius. Lee, Shepard, “A Double Life: Placing the Peri Presbeon,” 28–29 and Veg. 3. 23; see also the piece by Karantabis on the use of heavy cavalry in the times of Heraclius: Mark-Anthony Karantabis, “The Crucial Development of Heavy Cavalry under Herakleios and His Usage of Steppe Nomad Tactics,” *Hirundo The McGill Journal of Classical Studies* 4 (2005–2006): 28–41, especially 29–31.
- 176 Lee, Shepard, “A Double Life: Placing the Peri Presbeon,” 28–29. See also an excellent presentation on the subject by Rance: Rance, “The Date of the Military Compendium of Syrianus Magister,” 715. He provides great counterpoint to Lee’s and Shepard’s arguments. See also Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 79–81. The author states that in the time in question, heavy cavalry was present on Roman and Byzantine battlefields continuously.

Eramo, look promising¹⁷⁷ because they may shift the treatise's dating again to the 6th or 7th century.

Very convincing studies on the size of infantry shields and the placement of camps carried out by Philip Rance¹⁷⁸ are arguments in favor of the Middle Byzantine period, although in the summary, the author states that the data of the compendium remains uncertain.¹⁷⁹ Douglas Lee and Jonathan Shepard argue that chapters 33–47 could have been composed at a later date, around the 10th century but the main text was written in the 6th century.¹⁸⁰ John Haldon suggested an elegant solution; in his opinion, large parts of the text come from earlier times, but were compiled in the 9th century and the reality of that time is reflected in the work.¹⁸¹ Therefore, a large portion of the treatise may come from a source written during the reign of Justinian the Great, which has not survived to our time, and was later compiled by Syrianus.¹⁸²

While the dating of *De Re Strategica* has been questioned, an exact date for the treatise is not of that great importance to the considerations of fear and motivation in Late Antiquity. On the subject of motivation, morale, as well as the commander's attitude towards his soldiers or the ways of manipulating the enemy, Syrianus Magister is much closer to Vegetius' narration and the content of *Strategikon*. This may of course stem from the compilation of classical treatises; nevertheless, Syrianus' work proves very useful and is slightly closer to the tradition of Late Antiquity.

To a large extent *De Re Strategica* has not been analyzed sufficiently, due to its contents, which in many aspects, particularly with regard to cavalry and infantry tactics, are simply copies of what classic Greek military treatises had to say on the subject. Because of its heavily antiquarian section on the deployment

177 Immacolata Eramo, "Sul compendio militare di Siriano Magister," *Rivista Storica dell'Antichità* 41 (2011): 201–222 especially 219–222; Eramo, "On Syrianus Magister's military compendium," 97–116.

178 Rance, "The Date of the Military Compendium of Syrianus Magister," 729–737.

179 Rance, "The Date of the Military Compendium of Syrianus Magister," 738. According to Philip Rance we should rule out the theory that it is a Middle Byzantine edition of a source from the 6th century. In Philip Rance opinion we should rule out the theory that it is a Middle Byzantine edition of a source from the 6th century.

180 Lee, Shepard, "A Double Life: Placing the Peri Presbeon," 29; Eramo, "On Syrianus Magister's military compendium," 113.

181 John Haldon, "Information and War: Some Comments on Defensive Strategy and Information in the Middle Byzantine Period," in in: *War and warfare in Late Antiquity*, ed. Alexander Sarantis and Neil Christie (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 381.

182 On Syrianus' work with the sources, see Immacolata Eramo, "Les écrits tactiques byzantins et leurs sources: l'exemple du De re strategica de Syrianos Magister," *Rivista di Diritto Romano* 18 (2018): 1–16.

of troops and their equipment, the treatise was not seen as a viable source by scholars. Despite this fact, *De Re Strategica* is an insightful piece, especially with regard to the subject of this study, i.e. the overlapping area between warfare and psychology, providing an intriguing perspective on the theatre of the battlefield. Syrianus Magister must have been a keen observer of reality; this is evidenced in the section of his work devoted to the treatment of soldiers¹⁸³ – in several instances he not only supplements the knowledge found in the work of Vegetius and in *Strategikon*, but even goes as far as to consciously suggest new, more complicated and more mature solutions. As such, *De Re Strategica* is a unique treatise offering extraordinary research opportunities.

The edition of the work that I'm using here is the one prepared by G.T. Dennis in *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*; back then it was still known as *The Anonymous Byzantine Treatise on Strategy*.¹⁸⁴ The latest translation was prepared by the aforementioned V.V. Kuchma.¹⁸⁵

5.4 Strategikon

The final primary source from Late Antiquity is the anonymous work entitled *Strategikon* (Στρατηγικόν). It was written at the end of the 6th or at the beginning of the 7th century.¹⁸⁶ The treatise was most likely compiled in the course of fighting against the Slavs and Avars in the Balkans during the reign of Emperor Maurice (582–602), or during the usurpation of Phokas (602–610). It is difficult to treat the Avar-Antes war of 602 as the limit for dating the treatise,

183 For example, Syrianus Magister was highly aware of what methods were used to manipulate your own forces or the enemy's; like the strategems related to elements of Roman military equipment and its non-combat use. This issue will be analyzed separately in another section of this work.

184 George T. Dennis ed. Περὶ Στρατηγικῆς, in: *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1985), 1–136. The completeness of Dennis's text is confirmed by Kuchma. Kuchma, *О стратегии. Византийский военный трактат VI века*, 9.

185 It is surprising that Kuchma makes no mention of what Zuckerman and Rance concluded regarding the authorship of the treatise. On the other hand, he states that the treatise is likely part of a larger whole and quotes Dain's conclusions. Dain and de Foucault, "Les Stratégistes byzantins," 317–392; Kuchma, *О стратегии. Византийский военный трактат VI века*, 11. Even in the title of his translation Kuchma points to the 6th century as the date of origin of the treatise, which leaves no room for doubt as to which theory he supports.

186 The dispute about the dating of the work was summed up by Dennis in the introduction to the German edition of *Strategikon*. George T. Dennis ed. trans. by Ernst Gamillscheg *Das Strategikon des Maurikios* (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981), 15–19. Different dating is provided by: Shuvalov, *Секрет армии Юстиниана восточно-ромская армия в 491–641 гг.*, 257–259.

because it did not result in the complete destruction of the Antes tribe.¹⁸⁷ So, the *terminus ante quem* for the complete work is the invasion of the Arabs, as there is no mention of them anywhere in the treatise. The author of the treatise was most likely not Emperor Maurice, as some scholars believe,¹⁸⁸ although we cannot exclude the possibility that it was compiled at the emperor's request by someone from among the prominent commanders of the time. In his unpublished dissertation, John Wiita supports the idea that the author of the treatise was *strategos* Philippicus, who, according to information found in the work of Theophylact Simocatta, supposedly had an interest in ancient warfare.¹⁸⁹ This is an interesting alternative to the more popular claim of Maurice's authorship, but it needs to be analyzed with due care. Theophylact, on whose work Witta based his whole hypothesis, mentions that Scipio Africanus was supposedly Philippicus' role model,¹⁹⁰ but *Strategikon* lacks any references to that famous Roman general.¹⁹¹ Interestingly enough, following the usurpation of power by Phokas in 602, Philippicus survived the resulting purge in the capital and retired from politics to a monastery, so he certainly would have had the time to write down his military experiences. As such, this theory should not be discarded immediately, especially as Philippicus had the opportunity to fight against the Persians, as well as the Slavs and Avars, i.e. the peoples that are given the most attention in the treatise.¹⁹²

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- 187 Sym. 8. 5. 13. It would be wrong to assume that the Avars managed to completely eradicate the Antes at the beginning of the 7th century, especially since other sources suggest that the Antes must have existed as a separate tribe even around 612, when Emperor Heraclius assumed the title *Anticus*, Gerhard Rösch, *Onoma Basileias: Studien zum offiziellen Gebrauch der Kaisertitel in spätantiker und frühbyzantiner Zeit* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1978), 170, similarly to what Maurice did before him. Kardaras goes as far as to suggest that during the reign of Heraclius the Antes were still under Roman influence and still played a certain role in the defence of the Danube limes – mainly Scythia Minor, see: Georgios Kardaras, "The Byzantine-Antic treaty (545/56 A.D.) and the defence of Scythia Minor," *Byzantinoslavica* 68 (2010): 85. In any case, after 602 the military importance of the Antes was marginalized.
- 188 François Aussaresses, "L'auteur de Stratégicon," *Revue des études anciennes* 8 (1906): 23–40. A more contemporary work: Cosentino, "Writing about war in Byzantium," 86. He justifies his opinion with the fact that Codex Ambrosianus 19 attributes the work to Maurice. See edition of the code: Barbara Leoni, *La Parafrasi Ambrosiana dello Strategicon di Maurizio. L'arte della guerra a Bisanzio*. (Milano: De Gruyter, 2003).
- 189 Sym. 1. 14; John Earl Wiita, *The Ethnika in Byzantine Military Treatises* (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1977), 30–49.
- 190 Sym. 2. 14.
- 191 As opposed to, e.g. Hannibal.
- 192 A discussion on the author of the treatise was interestingly summed up by Salvatore Cosentino, "Per una nuova edizione dei Naumachica ambrosiani. Il De fluminibus traicendis (Strat. XII B, 21)," *Bizantinistica Rivista di Studi Bizantini e Slavi* 3 (2001): 65–66.

Although *Strategikon* was probably written by a practitioner,¹⁹³ it, like other military treatises, contains a number of antiquarian passages and sections copied from other works.¹⁹⁴ In the case of certain fragments of text, we can pretty accurately identify the previous works that either inspired the author or were simply copied. A large part of military proverbs (γνώμικὰ) are translations of the Latin *regulae belorum generales* which come from Vegetius' book, although it is hard to establish whether both authors used the same source or if the author of *Strategikon* compiled and translated a fragment of Vegetius' work.¹⁹⁵ It is possible that Book XI, devoted to the neighbors of the Empire, was based on official reports of Byzantine diplomats collected in imperial archives, which the author of the treatise had access to. In the past, similar reports prepared by military personnel were used by the already mentioned Theophylact Simocatta when describing the Roman campaign along the Danube¹⁹⁶ limes.¹⁹⁷ The practice, then, was nothing new, and assuming that the author of *Strategikon* had close ties to the court in Constantinople,¹⁹⁸ it would be no trouble for him to make use of such sources. The whole of Book XIIB was probably copied from another work describing infantry operations in the first half of the 6th century, which is evident from the anachronistic terms used for Roman equipment and

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- 193 See for example an interesting case study: Carlo Maria Mazzucchi, "Le katagraphai dello *Strategikon* di Maurizio e lo schieramento di battaglia dell'esercito romano nel VI–VII secolo," *Aevum* 55 (1981): 111–138.
- 194 The work is an excellent example of a synthesis of Greek and Roman warcraft in the Greek-speaking East. For more on synthesizing Greek culture into that of the Empire, see: Anthony Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium: The Transformations of Greek Identity and the Reception of the Classical Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- 195 Różycki, *Mauricij Strategicon*, 178–190.
- 196 On the term denoting the fortified Roman border and the soldiers serving there in Late Antiquity, see: Benjamin Isaac, "The meaning of the terms limes and limitanei," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 78 (1988): 125–147. Benjamin Isaac clearly emphasized that *limitanei*, meaning border soldiers, were not farmers, but highly motivated professionals, who in some instances fulfilled their duties to the very end, despite lack of support from the central government (especially in the western regions of the Empire). See also for a very well-known example from Noricum: Eugippius, *Vita Sancti Severini*, 4. 20.
- 197 See: Terézia Olajos, *Les sources de Théophylacte Simocatta historien* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 128–149; Hans Wilhelm Haussig, "Theophylakts Exkurs über die skythischen Völker," *Byzantion* 23 (1953): 295–300; Otto Veh, *Untersuchungen zu dem byzantinischen Historiker Theophylaktos Simokattes* (Fürth: Druckerei Dörfler, 1957), 14–15. An attempt to reconstruct the structure of such a military report, which might have been used by Theophylact, was undertaken by Michael Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and his Historian Theophylact Simocatta on Persian and Balkan Warfare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 97–98.
- 198 Each hypothesis assumes that the author was someone who had access to the state's elite citizens and was also a member of the said elites.

certain linguistic aspects.¹⁹⁹ Which is not to say that the fragment was copied mindlessly. The author of *Strategikon* used it as a basis, which he then supplemented with practical information clearly originating from the second half of the 6th century. On the other hand, comments on commanding the cavalry must have been taken from the Avar period, i.e. post 581, which is evidenced by the large amount of Avar equipment that had been imported into Roman cavalry gear²⁰⁰ and by the partial adoption of nomad tactics.²⁰¹ The author, being an experienced soldier, also incorporated a piece of information into a section on cavalry that is a veritable treasure trove for scholars – Latin commands, written in Greek font, that were used by officers during exercises.²⁰²

As I have mentioned before, *Strategikon* was likely the work of someone with practical military experience, which makes this a unique source on the history of the Roman army in the second half of the 6th century. The language of the treatise is easily approachable Greek, with numerous Latinisms²⁰³ and occasional instances of more obscure military jargon. It was likely primarily

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- 199 See: Karl Eduard Zachariä von Lingenthal, "Wissenschaft und Recht für das Heer vom 6. bis zum Anfang des 10. Jahrhunderts," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 3 (1894): 437–457; Richard Vári, "Zur Überlieferung mittelgriechischer Taktiker," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 15/1 (1906): 47–87.
- 200 Samuel Szadeczky-Kardoss, "Az avar-turk hatas Bizanc hadművészete 600 körül," in *Nomad tarsadalmak es allamalakulatok*, ed. Ferenc Tökei (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1983), 317–326; Samuel Szadeczky-Kardoss, "Der awarisch-türkische Einfluss auf die byzantinische Kriegskunst um 600 (Anmerkungen zum Strategikon des Maurikios)," in *Avarica. Über die Awarengeschichte und ihre Quellen*, ed. Samuel Szadeczky-Kardoss (Szeged: Universitas de Attila József nominate, 1986), 205–213; Łukasz Różycki, "Awarskie importy w rzymskiej armii w drugiej połowie VI wieku," in *W panczeru przez wieki*, ed. Andrzej Niewiński (Oświęcim: Napoleon V, 2014), 16–26; Georgios Kardaras, *Byzantium and the Avars, 6th–9th Century AD Political, Diplomatic and Cultural Relations* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 156–176.
- 201 On the subject of Avar heavy cavalry, see: Katalin Nagy, "Notes on the Arms of Avar Heavy Cavalry," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 58/2 (2005): 135–140; it is worth noting how important *Strategikon* is in the argumentation of Katalin Nagy.
- 202 *Das Strategikon des Maurikios*. ed. George T. Dennis, trans. Ernst Gamillscheg (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981), 3. 5. Further referred to as: Strat.
- 203 There are several excellent studies on the linguistic choices of the author of the treatise, particularly with regard to the passages in Latin. See more in: Haralambie Mihăescu, "Les éléments latins des *Tactica strategica* de Maurice-Urbicius et leur echo en neogrec," *Revue des études sud-est européennes* 6 (1968): 481–498; Haralambie Mihăescu, "Les éléments latins des *Tactica-strategica* de Maurice-Urbicius et leur echo en neo-grec," *Revue des études sud-est européennes* 7 (1969): 155–166, 267–280; Haralambie Mihăescu, "Les termes de commandement militaires latins dans le *Strategicon* de Maurice," *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique* 14 (1969): 261–272.

aimed at fresh commanders,²⁰⁴ who required introduction into the tactics, equipment and organizational structure of the imperial armies. This, in and of itself makes the work immensely valuable, as the author set out to give a comprehensive rundown of Roman warcraft during the reign of Emperor Maurice (582–602). The author must have believed that in war a military leader should possess vast knowledge about the enemy, extending beyond the military aspects, and also including the customs²⁰⁵ and internal politics. *Strategikon* also served as a starting point for many authors of successive military treatises, making its mark on the whole genre all the way to the 10th century.²⁰⁶ The author devotes similar attention to the theatre of war, analyzing and listing basic ruses and stratagems known since ancient times. An invaluable addition by the author of *Strategikon* was supplementing this classic list with significantly more advanced methods not known from other sources. The person who wrote the treatise was also acutely aware of the importance of psychology on the battlefield, which he makes clear in numerous passages.

For over a hundred years, *Strategikon* has been the subject of intensive studies conducted by historians, as well as classical philologists and archaeologists. Particular attention was always given to the Slavs and Avars, as in the study by the Czech scholar of the Balkans and early Byzantine Empire, Bohumila Zástěrová, whose work on the Slavs and Avars was published in French in 1971.²⁰⁷ Shortly afterwards, i.e. in 1977, J. Wiita defended his dissertation about the ethnic groups mentioned in *Strategikon* at the University of Minnesota. Another important work on the subject, by Gerard Labuda, was published in 1954 and dealt with the chronology of Roman-Barbarian Wars at the end of the 6th century.²⁰⁸ Interest in studying *Strategikon* rose once again in the second half of the 1980s, which saw the publication of a translation of the treatise by Ernst Gamillscheg with an edited version of the Greek

204 This claim is also supported by D. Sullivan, who stated that the treatise was written for mid-ranking Roman officers. Sullivan, "Byzantine Military Manuals," 151.

205 In the case of the Slavs, we should bear in mind that there is a passage in the work of Procopius of Caesarea that is at least partially similar to the later description by the author of *Strategikon*. Procopius Caesarensis, *De Bellis*, 7. 14.

206 We only need to look at John Haldon's excellent commentary to *Tactica* to realize how influential *Strategikon* has been. John Haldon, *A Critical Commentary on the Tactica of Leon VI* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2014), 39–55, where the author talks about the sources used in the writing of *Tactica*.

207 Bohumila Zástěrová, *Les Avars et les Slaves dans la Tactique de Maurice* (Praha: Academia, 1971).

208 Gerard Labuda, "La Chronologie des guerres de Byzance contre les Avars et les Slaves à la fin du VI^e siècle," *Byzantinoslavica* 11 (1954): 167–173.

text by George T. Dennis;²⁰⁹ who soon afterwards translated the treatise into English.²¹⁰ It is worth noting that, prior to that, Romanian²¹¹ and Russian²¹² translations were already available, and that most recently the work was also translated into Spanish²¹³ and Modern Greek.²¹⁴ Ever since the publication of the first modern translation, *Strategikon* has remained a frequent subject of study. Looking at the most recent studies, one must give credit to the significant analytical contributions of Philip Rance,²¹⁵ who for some years now has been working on a revised edition of the treatise, which is to include a comprehensive critical apparatus. *Strategikon* has been referred to in numerous works of literature, and it is used as an excellent supplementary source by linguists, archaeologists, as well as historians and epigraphists. For any scholar writing about the period between the second half of the 6th century and the first half of the 7th, the treatise is simply a mandatory source.²¹⁶ Examples that

209 George T. Dennis ed. trans. by Ernst Gamillscheg *Das Strategikon des Maurikios* (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981).

210 *Maurice's Strategikon Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*. trans. George T. Dennis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984).

211 *Mauricius, Arta militară*. ed. trans. Haralambie Mihăescu (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1970).

212 *Стратегикон Маврикия*, trans. Vladimir Vasilievich Kuchma (Saint Petersburg: Aletheia, 2004).

213 *Strategikon Mauricio, emperador de Oriente*. trans. Emilio Magaña Orúe, Julio Rodríguez González and José Ignacio de la Torre Rodríguez (Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa, 2014).

214 *Μαυρικίου τακτικά στρατηγικά* trans. Sofia Gyftopoulou (Thessaloniki: Stamouli, 2016).

215 Rance, "Simulacra Pugnae," 223–275; Philip Rance, "Drungus, δρουγγος and δρουγγιστι: A Gallicism and Continuity in Late Roman Cavalry Tactics," *Phoenix* 58 (2004): 96–130; Rance, "The Fulcum, the Late Roman and Byzantine Testudo," 265–326; Philip Rance, "Narses and the Battle of Taginae (Busta Gallorum) 552: Procopius and Sixth-Century Warfare," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 54/4 (2005): 424–472; Rance, "The Date of the Military Compendium of Syrianus Magister," 701–737; Philip Rance, "The Etymologicum Magnum and the 'Fragment of Urbicius,'" *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 47 (2007): 193–224; Philip Rance, "Noumera or Mounera: a parallel philological problem in De Cerimoniis and Maurice's Strategikon," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 58 (2008): 121–130; Philip Rance, "Maurice's Strategicon and 'the Ancients': the Late Antique Reception of Aelian and Arrian," in *Greek Taktika: Ancient Military Writing and its Heritage, Proceedings of the International Conference on Greek Taktika held at the University of Toruń, 7–11 April 2005*, ed. Philip Rance, Nicholas Sekunda (Gdańsk: Akanthina, 2017), 217–255.

216 See works devoted to the raiding and colonisation of the Balkans by barbarians in Early Middle Ages: Faidon Maligoudis, *Σλάβοι στη Μεσαιωνική Ελλάδα* (Thessaloniki: Vantias, 1991); Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and his Historian Theophylact Simocatta*; Florin Curta, *The Making of Slavs History and Archaeology of the Lower Danube Region, c. 500–700*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). And this latest piece focusing on the raids both in a historical as well as archaeological context: Alexander Sarantis, *Justinian's*

confirm this trend include the monograph by Florin Curta,²¹⁷ the great work by Walter Pohl,²¹⁸ the recent works written by Georgios Kardaras²¹⁹ or the less stellar summary of the reign of Maurice by Franziska Schlosser.²²⁰ I have analyzed the issues of military psychology and the theatre of the battlefield in the context of *Strategikon* in several articles,²²¹ which to a large degree form the core ideas of this book.

The author of *Strategikon*, as has already been mentioned, was familiar with the work of Vegetius and referred to it when listing military maxims (γνωμικά). Other sections of *De Re Militari* influenced the creation of *Strategikon* to a much lesser extent. In terms of references to the treatise by Syrianus Magister, the situation is a bit more complicated. An analysis of the content reveals no direct correlation between the text of *De Re Strategica* and *Strategikon*.²²² However, specific elements in the description of tactics point to the fact that Syrianus wrote his treatise before the creation of *Strategikon*.²²³ In my book,

Balkan Wars: Campaigning, Diplomacy and Development in Illyricum, Thrace and the Northern World A.D. 527–65 (Prenton: Francis Cairns, 2016).

- 217 See particularly the description of *Strategikon* as a historical source with some thoughts on the authorship: Curta, *The Making of Slavs*, 50–52. And also: Florin Curta, “Avar Blitzkrieg, Slavic and Bulgar raiders, and Roman special ops: mobile warriors in the 6th-century Balkans,” in *Central Eurasia in the Middle Ages Studies in Honour of Peter B. Golden*, ed. Istvan Zimanyi and Osman Karatay (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2016), 69–89; Florin Curta, “Horsemen in forts or peasants in villages? Remarks on the archaeology of warfare in the 6th to 7th century Balkans,” in *War and warfare in Late Antiquity*, ed. Alexander Sarantis and Neil Christie (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 809–850.
- 218 Walter Pohl, *Die Awaren. Ein Steppenvolk in Mitteleuropa 567–822 n. Chr.* (München: Beck, 1988).
- 219 Georgios Kardaras, “Ο βυζαντινός στρατός στο „Στρατηγικόν” του Μαυρικίου Οπλισμός, τακτικές, οργάνωση,” *PANZER* 17 (2004): 1–9; Georgios Kardaras, “The Episode of Busas (596/7) and the Use of Siege Engines by the Avars,” *Byzantinoslavica* 68 (2005): 53–66; Georgios Kardaras, “Το ‘σχήμα των Αβάρων’ στο Στρατηγικόν του Μαυρικίου: Μια κριτική προσέγγιση,” *Βυζαντινός Δόμος* 16 (2007): 151–167, and especially: Georgios Kardaras, “Οι βυζαντινοαβερικές διενέξεις και η μεθόριος του Δούναβη 558–626” in *Η μεθόριος του Δούναβη και ο κόσμος της στην εποχή της μετανάστευσης των λαών (4ος–7ος αι.)*, ed. Georgios Kardaras, and Sophia Patura-Spanu (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2008), 237–266.
- 220 Shlosser, *The Reign of the Emperor Maurikios*. See also a short summary of sources dealing with the Slavs in the 6th century by the same author: Franziska Shlosser, “The Slavs in Sixth-Century Byzantine Sources,” *Byzantinoslavica* 61 (2003): 75–82.
- 221 Łukasz Różycki, “Strach – elementy słowiańskiej „wojny psychologicznej” w świetle Strategikonu,” *Prace Historyczne* 141/4 (2014): 853–861; Łukasz Różycki, “Fear – an aspect of Byzantine Psychological Warfare,” *Vox Patrum* 35/63 (2015): 459–473; Łukasz Różycki, “Fear – elements of Slavic ‘Psychological Warfare,’” *Journal of Ancient History and Archeology* 2/1 (2015): 23–29.
- 222 Różycki, *Mauricii Strategicon*, 190–203 and 203–231.
- 223 Różycki, *Mauricii Strategicon*, 190–202.

I will be referring to the established edition of the Greek treatise prepared by G.T. Dennis.²²⁴

For the purpose of my studies, the source materials are of crucial importance, and a large portion of this book should be considered source commentary. The footnotes will always include the original Latin or Greek version of any translated passage. Despite the existence of excellent translations into English and other modern languages, I have decided to prepare my own, for each fragment of any work from Antiquity that will be referenced. This is due to the character of this study, i.e. focusing on battlefield psychology, which means that I will be interested in subjects that might have been generalized by other translators, particularly with regard to terminology. In many instances, I have also decided to retain original names and military titles, as it is my belief that modern military ranks do not always accurately reflect the specific character and structure of the Roman army.

5.5 *Supplementary Sources*

Classical works on the art of war will be of some comparative importance to my studies. The section on the ideal commander will require references to Onasander's work entitled *Στρατηγικός*.²²⁵ I will also refer to a piece by Aelianus Tacticus, who had a large impact on the author of *Strategikon*,²²⁶ as well as the writings of Lucius Flavius Arrianus²²⁷ and the classical work by Aeneas Tacticus on defending fortifications.²²⁸ Two treatises by Polyaeus²²⁹

224 George T. Dennis ed. trans. by Ernst Gamillscheg *Das Strategikon des Maurikios* (Wien: Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1981).

225 See for example Yann LeBohec, "Que voulait Onesandros?" in *Claude de Lyon, Empereur Romain*, ed. Yves Burnand, Yann Le Bohec, Jean-Pierre Martin (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1998), 169–79; Christopher John Smith, "Onasander on How to be a General," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies. Supplement* 71 (1998): 151–166 with a good excerpt of compulsory literature. Christopher John Smith, "Onasander on how to be a general," in *Modus Operandi. Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Rickman*, ed. Michel Austin, Jill Harries and Christopher John Smith (London: Institute of Classical Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, 1998), 151–66. Also James T. Chlup, "Just War in Onasander's ΣΤΡΑΤΗΓΙΚΟΣ," *Journal of Ancient History* 2/1 (2014): 37–63.

226 Rance, "Maurice's Strategicon and 'the Ancients,'" 217–255.

227 Philip Stadter, "The Ars Tactica of Arrian: Tradition and Originality," *Classical Philology* 73 (1978): 117–128; Everett L. Wheeler, "The Occasion of Arrian's Tactica," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 19 (1978): 351–365.

228 Bogdan Burliga, "Tactical Issues in Aeneas Tacticus," in *Greek Taktika. Ancient Military Writing and its Heritage*, ed. Philip Rance and Nicholas V. Sekunda (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2017), 94–106.

229 For the impact of Polyaeus on Byzantine warfare see for example Alphonse Dain, "Les Cinq adaptations Byzantines de les Stratagèmes de Polyen," *Revue des études*

and Frontinus²³⁰ are other excellent supplementary sources, which will help to verify the usefulness of suggested Late Antiquity stratagems.

Beside *De Re Strategica* by Syrianus Magister, a treatise that could have been written in the Middle Byzantine period, I will also make use of works written in the Middle Byzantine period. The *Tactica*,²³¹ from the reign of Leo VI the Wise²³² (866–912), is of comparative significance; its author drew on the rich tradition of ancient military treatises. Another important source will be *Sylloge Tacticorum*²³³ written most probably in the first half of the 10th century.²³⁴ The revival of Roman military art is reflected in three other treatises:²³⁵ Nikephoros Ouranos's²³⁶ *Taktika*,²³⁷ the *Praecepta Militaria*²³⁸ and *De velitatione bellica*²³⁹

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- anciennes* 33/4 (1931): 321–346. On the author himself and research into his works, with a complete excerpt of literature on the subject, see a collective work: Kai Brodersen ed. *Polyaenus: New Studies / Polyainos. Neue Studien* (Berlin: Verlag Antike, 2010), especially Everett L. Wheeler, "Polyaenus: Scriptor Militaris," in *Polyaenus: New Studies / Polyainos. Neue Studien*, ed. Kai Brodersen (Berlin: Verlag Antike, 2010), 3–42.
- 230 More on Fortinus' life in Anthony Birley, *The Fasti of Roman Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 69–72. See also a fascinating work by Everett L. Wheeler, "The Modern Legality of Frontinus' Stratagems," *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen* 43/1 (1988): 7–29.
- 231 An exhaustive work on the treatise itself, its sources and Middle Byzantine warfare in Haldon, *A Critical Commentary on the Tactica*, 3–118.
- 232 Shaun Tougher, *The Reign of Leo VI (886–912): Politics and People* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 169.
- 233 See especially Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals* plus the translation and commentary on *Sylloge Tacticorum* by Georgios Chatzelis and Jonathan Harris. Briefly also in Eric McGeer, "Infantry versus Cavalry: The Byzantine Response," *Revue des études byzantines* 46 (1988): 136.
- 234 See more in Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 40–53 – dating of 920–944.
- 235 Of some importance to the narration is also the appendix to *De ceremonis* by Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos: *Constantini Porphyrogeniti tres tractatus de expeditionibus militaribus imperatoris* and the military speeches of the emperor. See also Meredith Riedel, "Biblical echoes in two Byzantine military speeches," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 40/2 (2016): 207–222.
- 236 More on Nikephoros Ouranos in Eric McGeer, "Tradition and Reality in the Taktika of Nikephoros Ouranos," *Dunbarton Oaks Papers* 45 (1991): 129–140; Frank Trombley, "The Taktika of Nikephoros Ouranos and Military Encyclopaedism," in *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts*, ed. Peter Binkley (Leiden – New York – Köln: Brill, 1997), 261–274.
- 237 The treatise has not been fully edited yet. See Alphonse Dain ed. *La "Tactique" de Nicéphore* Ouranos (Paris: Les Belles-Lettres, 1937); McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 88–163; Jules Albert de Foucault, "Douze chapitres inédits de la Tactique de Nicéphore Ouranos," *Travaux et Mémoire* 5 (1973): 281–312; Pryor and Jeffreys, *The Age of the Δρομων*, 571–605.
- 238 McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 3–59. Briefly: Georgios Theotokis, *The Norman Campaigns in the Balkans, 1081–1108 AD* (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2014), 58–61.
- 239 See especially comments in Gilbert Dagron and Haralambie Mihăescu trans., ed. *Le Traité sur la guérilla de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1986), 103–318 and an appendix by Jean-Claude Cheynet, "Les Phocas," in *Le traité sur la guérilla de l'empereur*

written in the 10th century in the Phokas family²⁴⁰ plus an anonymous treatise *Byzantini liber De Re Militari*.²⁴¹ Interestingly, in this book, the sources from the Middle Byzantine period supplement the three major treatises.

Nicéphore Phocas, ed. Gilbert Dagron and Haralambie Mihăescu (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1986), 319–360. Roman warfare in the context of hit-and-run tactics described in two texts by Gastone Breccia, “Grandi imperi e piccole guerre. Roma, Bisanzio e la guerriglia (I),” *Medioevo Greco. Rivista di storia e di filologia bizantina* 7 (2007): 13–68; Gastone Breccia, “Grandi imperi e piccole guerre. Roma, Bisanzio e la guerriglia (II)” *Medioevo Greco* 8 (2008): 49–131.

- 240 According to Dennis, the author was Leo Phocas, Nikephoros's brother while in the opinion of Gilbert Dagron and Haralambie Mihăescu, the work was written by Nikephoros himself and edited anonymously. Gilbert Dagron and Haralambie Mihăescu trans., ed. *Le Traité sur la guérilla de l'empereur Nicéphore Phocas* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 1986), 137–143.
- 241 More on the text itself in George T. Dennis, ed., trans. *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1985), 241–244.

The Concept of War in Roman Military Treatises

As an initial point, we should shed some light on the Roman ideology¹ surrounding warfare,² which can be discerned from the pages of the military manuals.³ The authors who are the subject of this study did not usually delve into philosophical deliberations, or problems that were not directly related to commanding armies, but their works nevertheless include at least elements of the Roman understanding of war in the period in question.⁴ It was simply natural for practitioners to share their own experiences and for theoreticians to share their observations. Let me note here that the approach to violence developed by military theoreticians was slightly different from the official doctrine.

The attitude towards war adopted by eastern Romans was not that of pacifists; the emperors, reigning by divine right, were guardians of the *Roman*

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- 1 See also a summary of the fascinating approach that anthropologists take when looking at war. In tandem with archaeologists, they are searching for the underlying causes of conflicts in primitive societies. The summary can be found in a professional, well-researched piece by Otto Ton: Otto Ton, "Conceptions of Warfare In Western Thought and Research An Introduction," in *Warfare and Society Archaeological and Social Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Otto Ton, H. Thrane, Helle Vandkilde (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2006), 23–28.
 - 2 On this topic, see a short piece by Johannes Koder and Ioannis Stouraitis. "Byzantine Approaches to Warfare (6th–12th centuries). An Introduction," in *Byzantine war ideology between Roman imperial concept and Christian religion*, ed. Johannes Koder and Ioannis Stouraitis (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012), 9–16. And an excellent book by Stouraitis: Ioannis Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden in derpolitischen und ideologischen Wahrnehmung in Byzanz* (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2009). A short summary of the issue provided also by Évelyne Patlagean, *Un moyen âge grec: Byzance, IX^e–XV^e siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2007), 207–209, indicating the 6th century as the time of breakthrough.
 - 3 The lack of studies on the theoreticians' approach to war and violence was pinpointed by John Haldon. See John Haldon, "Fighting for Peace': Justifying Warfare and Violence in the Medieval East Roman World," in *The Cambridge World History of Violence*, ed. Matthew S. Gordon, Richard W. Kaeuper and Harriet Zurndorfer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 493–494. The text below is not an attempt to systematize the studies on the issue but it may serve as a starting point for discussion. Notably, military treatises as an auxiliary source are largely used by scholars in a discussion on Byzantine war theory.
 - 4 For the preceding period see some general remarks in: Victor Davis Hanson, "The Roman Way of War," in *The Cambridge History of Warfare*, ed. Geoffrey Parker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 46–60.

*Oecumene*⁵ interpreted also in its religious sense as a community expanding beyond the Empire's borders.⁶ Ultimately, emperors acquired the right to fight wars in order to maintain and re-assert Roman supremacy.⁷ This means that war was treated as an acceptable means to make or re-establish peace. Offensive wars were justified in a similar way; they were expected to lead to recapturing territories lost by the Empire.⁸ This was despite the teachings of the fathers of the Church, especially Saint Basil the Great⁹ who condemned violence, seeing no excuse for soldiers who shed blood during their service.¹⁰ Theoretically, a Christian army could go to war if the reason behind the conflict

5 Gudrun Schmalzbauer, "Überlegungen zur Idee der Ökumene in Byzanz," in *Wiener Byzantinistik und Neogräzistik. Beiträge zum Symposium 40 Jahre Institut für Byzantinistik und Neogräzistik der Universität Wien im Gedenken an Herbert Hunger*, ed. Maria A. Hörandner Wolfram and Johannes Koder (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004), 408–419.

6 See especially the excellent work on the relations between the state and religion and the re-evaluation of the concept of a just war and a holy war in the Empire: Ioannis Stouraitis, "Just War' and 'Holy War' in the Middle Ages. Rethinking Theory through the Byzantine Case-Study," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 62: 227–265. Similar findings in Haldon, "Fighting for Peace," 492–512.

7 On the Roman state ideology in Byzantium: Hélène Ahrweiler, *L'idéologie politique de l'Empire byzantin* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975); Johannes Koder, "Die räumlichen Vorstellungen der Byzantiner von der Ökumene (4. bis 12. Jahrhundert)," *Anzeiger der philosophisch-historischen Klasse der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 137/2 (2002): 15–34; Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden*. Notably, in his studies on the concept of war and its relations with religion, John Haldon clearly indicated an alliance between the state and the Church. In his opinion, in the time following the reign of Constantine the Great, soldiers were completely accepted by the society as defenders of the faith and the Empire. Haldon, "Fighting for Peace," 492–512, especially 496–505, here 497.

8 Stouraitis, "Just War' and 'Holy War,'" 252–3, 264.

9 See an analysis carried out by Warren Treadgold: Warren Treadgold, "Byzantium, The Reluctant Warrior," in *Noble Ideals and Bloody Realities Warfare in the Middle Ages*, ed. Niall Christie and Maya Yazigi (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 209–213.

10 Any man who killed another, even in the name of the Emperor and his country, had to pay penance like any other Christian, and, before being granted absolution for his sin, was unable to receive sacraments. Basil of Caesarea considered killing to be one of the heaviest transgressions, and even those soldiers who only did their duty, had to repent for taking the life of a fellow man. It must be said that the canons of Basil the Great require further study, while the actual concept of war is ambiguous. See Basilius Magnus, *Epistula* 188. PG 32, 663–683. About further studies on the war and pacifism in Basil's writing: Stouraitis, "Just War' and 'Holy War,'" 249–250.

was morally justifiable (*bellum iustum*).¹¹ Despite the Christian pacifism,¹² the Church forged an alliance with the state, accepting the belligerent rhetoric and often becoming a cog in the military machinery. This procedure, in stark contrast to the teachings of Basil the Great, is exemplified by the holy masses held before fighting, military prayers, the wide use of Christian iconography in the soldiers' clothing and ornaments, and the Church's official support for the Empire's military effort in the time of great crises¹³ like the war with

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- 11 The notion of a just war was known both to the Greeks (see, particularly: Plato, *Politeia* 5. 470c) and to the Romans. See more in: Mauro Mantovani, *Bellum iustum. Die idee des gerechten Krieges in der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1990). In the West, the Roman concept of a *bellum iustum* evolved, introduced into the Christian world by St. Augustine. This idea allowed for the existence of war and violence, absolving any soldiers who served the rightful ruler of the state and fought for a righteous cause. See, especially: *De Civitate Dei*, 3.10; 19.12. A war was deemed just if it was carried out by a legitimate government, and its cause was righteous. In the Middle Ages, St. Thomas Aquinas added a third condition – in his opinion a just war had to be waged with fairness and good intentions, assuming that the ultimate goal of any war is peace: *De Civitate Dei*, 19.12. The concept of a just war in the Empire in Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World*, 24; Stouraitis, “Just War’ and ‘Holy War,” 249–250. Notably, to the Romans war was justified by the mere fact that the enemy professed a different faith. In this case, religious differences did not justify a war; barbarians were targeted only when they posed a threat to the *Roman Oecumene*. Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden*, 249–250.
- 12 John Helgeland, *Christians and the Roman army from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Berlin & New York: De Gruyter, 1979); George Boobyer, “Christian Pacifism and the Way of Jesus,” *The Hibbert Journal* 45 (1957): 350–362; Giovanni Crescenti, *Obiettori di coscienza e martiri militari nei primi cinque secoli del cristianesimo* (Palermo: Flaccovio, 1966). Also the classical work Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les Légendes grecques des saints militaires* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1909).
- 13 The actual concept of a holy war should be mentioned here, as it was never fully accepted in the Empire. See Tia M. Kolbaba, “Fighting for Christianity. Holy War in the Byzantine Empire,” *Byzantion* 68 (1998): 194–221. Notably, while the idea of a holy war was not fully accepted in the Empire, during a war some rulers used (for propaganda and ideological purposes) the differences between the Romans and their opponents, mainly Persians, Arabs and, to some extent, nomads. See Athina Kolia-Dermitzaki, “Holy War’ In Byzantium Twenty Years Later A Question of Term Definition and Interpretation,” in *Byzantine war ideology between Roman imperial concept and Christian religion*, ed. Johannes Koder and Ioannis Stouraitis (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012), 121–132 (especially 122) and an excellent example of the procedure: Walter Emil Kaegi, “The Heraclians and Holy War,” in *Byzantine war ideology between Roman imperial concept and Christian religion*, ed. Johannes Koder and Ioannis Stouraitis (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012), 17–26. See also Vitalien Laurent, “L’idée de guerre sainte et la tradition byzantine,” *Revue Historique du Sud-Est Européen* 23 (1946): 7–98; Marius Canard, “La guerre sainte dans le monde islamique et dans le monde chrétien,” *Revue Africaine* 79 (1936): 605–623.

Persia during the reign of Heraclius, and the Arab siege of Constantinople.¹⁴ Therefore, in the East, the Christian love of peace and aversion to violence¹⁵ was often replaced by the Roman state ideology, even in the case of offensive operations.¹⁶ However, the majority of military conflicts the Empire had to deal with by the 10th century were defensive.¹⁷

On the other hand, the attitude of Roman theoreticians towards war was a combination of Christian religion, Roman military tradition and the state doctrine established during the reign of Constantine the Great.¹⁸ Still, the military treatises themselves do not present the state war ideology, but rather the methods employed and the doctrine-related approach to violence and bloodshed. Therefore, it is a slightly different reality than that on the state level.

The goal of this chapter is not to study the notion of peace and war in the Empire but rather to take a look at the idea of war and violence as seen by the

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- 14 See: Kolbaba, *Fighting for Christianity*, 194–221; Michał Wojnowski, “Religia a wojskowość bizantyńska w świetle traktatów wojskowych IX–XI wieku,” *Przegląd Historyczny* 100/2 (2009): 199–205. And, to a lesser extent: Aangeliki Laiou, “On Just War in Byzantium,” in *To Hellenikon: Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis Jr. vol. 1.*, ed. Speros Vryonis (New Rochelle: Artstide D. Caratzas, 1993), 153–174. The war between Rome and the Caliphate at that time can be defined as subcultural warfare as per Stephen Morillo’s typology. See Stephen Morillo, “A General Typology of Transcultural Wars: The Early Middle Ages and Beyond,” in *Transcultural Wars from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century*, ed. Hans-Henning Kortüm (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 29–42.
- 15 The tradition of the Eastern church also provides numerous military examples with the most prominent being the cult of soldier saints. See Leopold Kretzenbacher, Gerhard Oberhammer and Yajñapati Upādhyāya. *Griechische Reiterheilige als Gefangenenerretter: Bilder zu mittelalterlichen Legenden um Georgios, Demetrios und Nikolaos* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1983); Christopher Walter, *The Warrior Saints in Byzantine Art and Tradition* (Aldershot: Routledge, 2003); Monica White, *Military Saints in Byzantium and Rus, 900–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); John Haldon, *A Tale of Two Saints: The Passions and Miracles of Sts Theodore ‘the Recruit’ and ‘the General’* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016); Piotr Łukasz Grotowski, *Arms and Armour of the Warrior Saints Tradition and Innovation in Byzantine Iconography (843–1261)* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
- 16 On justification of war within the Empire over the centuries, see Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden*, 331–353.
- 17 This issue is discussed and the reasons and exceptions presented in Treadgold, “Byzantium, The Reluctant Warrior,” 209–223.
- 18 See especially Charles Matson Odhal, *Constantine and the Militarization of Christianity: A Contribution to the Study of Christian Attitudes toward War and Military Service* (PhD diss., University of California, 1976), 9–59 and an analysis of the former Christian attitude to the Empire and military service: John Shean, *Soldiering for God: Christianity and the Roman Army* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 71–104.

authors of the military treatises in question.¹⁹ They did not focus on the reasons for war, or the actual concept of war and peace; typically, their works centered on practical aspects of commanding people and minimizing losses. At that time, the idealized Roman commander could not be a pacifist by default²⁰ but, as a person advocating the Christian doctrine, he would try to avoid a frontal engagement and shedding the blood of his soldiers, trying rather to achieve victory in a different manner. A surprisingly large amount of information on the Roman approach to warfare in Christian times²¹ can be found in Vegetius's work. This is, of course, mainly due to the moralistic character of *De Re Militari*, which was to be a call to action – the restoration of the army and return of *virtus*. In his introduction to the section devoted to the role of the commanding officer during battle, the author paints the following picture of the Roman philosophy of warfare:

If anyone should read this history of warcraft, summarized from the works of established experts in this field, it is certain they will immediately feel the urge to swiftly learn the principles of waging war and methods of combat. We know that once two sides have engaged in open battle, the result will become evident within two to three hours, after which the defeated side loses all hope of victory. This is why it is imperative to consider, attempt and undertake everything in advance, before that critical moment comes to pass. It is the mark of a great leader that they always first strive to – if possible without any losses – destroy, or at least dishearten the enemy by launching raids from a concealed position, rather than seeking an open battle, where both sides are subject to the same threats.²²

19 Research into the relations between theory and practice was carried out by Κολιας, “Η πολεμική τακτική των Βυζαντινών,” 154–63. A similar study on military treatises was conducted for the 6th century by Demetrios Christodoulou, “Τα βυζαντινά Τακτικά κατά τον 6ο αιώνα μ.Χ. Θεωρία και πράξη,” *EINATIA* 8 (2004): 323–341.

20 See an excellent text on the Middle Byzantine period: Jean-Claude Cheynet, “Réflexions sur le ‘pacifisme byzantin,’” in *Pour l’amour de Byzance: hommage à Paolo Odorico*, ed. Christian Gastgeber, Charalampos Mesis, Dan Ioan Muresan and Filippo Ronconi (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2013), 63–73.

21 On the importance of the Christian religion in the Roman army, please refer to: Shean, *Soldiering for God*, in particular pages 71–103 for an analysis of the beginnings of Christianity and pages 369–408 dealing with the consequences of Christianizing the Empire and the use of religion in the army as an instrument of social conformism. See also Odhal, *Constantine and the Militarization of Christianity*, 9–59.

22 *Quisquis hos artis bellicae commentarios ex probatissimis auctoribus breuiatos legere dignabitur, quam primum rationem proelii depugnandique cupit audire praecepta. Sed conflictus*

The dominant notion in the above passage is that true mastery of command is expressed by being able to defeat the opponent, while expending the least amount of effort and preserving the lives of one's soldiers in the process.²³ A successful commander should be able to employ a variety of stratagems to gain advantage over the enemy, intimidate them and weaken them through hit-and-run raids. This is significant, because by "terrorizing" the enemy (*terreo*),²⁴ Vegetius understood exerting pressure using various, and at times extremely calculated methods. The word itself may mean terrifying the enemy, scaring them away or intimidating them into inaction. The use of the Latin verb *terreo* is by no means accidental, as the author wanted to suggest the multitude of means that could be used against the enemy instead of a frontal engagement. This indicates how important it was for Roman theoreticians and practitioners, who read military treatises, to influence the enemy and properly prepare the army for combat.

The term "preparing for combat" means more than simply providing equipment to the soldiers and ensuring they are physically fit; it also encompasses mental preparation, educating troops on the appearance and methods of the opposing force, building up a feeling of superiority over the enemy, familiarizing the men with the terrain, suppressing their fears and striking fear into the hearts of the enemy. This was the true responsibility of a leader – combat itself, as stated by Vegetius, was in the hands of fate and should be sought only if the officer in charge was certain of victory with minimal losses. This aspect of minimizing one's own losses is worth further consideration. If fighting could not be avoided, or the enemy tried to force a retreat or capitulation by employing hit-and-run tactics, the commander had no choice but a frontal engagement. Every author of a military manual emphasized that victory bought with much blood brings no glory and should be avoided at all costs. During battle, the initial minutes were decisive, as this was when the two sides were clashing both in military and mental terms. The side whose soldiers were better prepared and overcame their fear, would take the field and emerge victorious.

publicus duarum aut trium horarum certamine definitur, post quem partis eius, quae separata fuerit, spes omnes intercidunt. Ideo omnia ante cogitanda sunt, ante temptanda, ante facienda sunt, quam ad ultimum ueniat abruptum. Boni enim duces non aperto proelio, in quo est commune periculum, sed ex occulto semper adtemptant, ut integris suis, quantum possunt, hostes interimant uel certe terreant ... Veg. 3. 9.

23 More on the subject in Georgios Theotokis, *Byzantine Military Tactics in Syria and Mesopotamia in the Tenth Century: A Comparative Study* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 26–41.

24 A common term, sometimes also used to mean scaring someone so that they do not take any action; see in Caesar's work: *ut, si nostros loco depulsos vidisset, quo minus libere hostes insequerentur, terreret. Bellum Gallicum*, 7. 49.

It was the commander's task to prepare his men for this test by any means possible, and at the same time to undermine the enemy's efforts. While preparation of the army for fighting and care for soldiers' lives can be attributed to the Christian attitude to violence, in practice it was also reasonable asset management. Victory ensured by methods other than combat, on which the authors of the treatises placed a strong emphasis, adhered to the Christian doctrine of avoiding violence. It was also the most reasonable and, in many cases, the least expensive use of the troops available to a Roman commander.²⁵

A similar sentiment was expressed by the author of *Strategikon*, whose comments on mindlessly pursuing open battle echo those of Vegetius. In the introduction to Book VII, devoted to preparing an army for battle, the author of *Strategikon* compares warfare to a hunt, with the following passage:

War is akin to a hunt. To overcome a wild animal, one needs to track it, employ snares, lay an ambush, sneak up on it and surround it, and use other stratagems, not brute force. In warfare, you should do the same, regardless if the enemies are many or few. Trying to defeat the enemy in open battle, fighting face to face, even if victory is likely, may result in heavy casualties and prove risky. Apart from few specific exceptions, it is folly to seek out victory, whose glory rings hollow, in such costly manner.²⁶

This attitude towards war is not unusual and typifies most authors of military treatises who wrote in Christian times²⁷ in the Roman East.²⁸ Fighting, according to Christian beliefs, is wrong, especially if it leads to the death of God-fearing soldiers,²⁹ which is why it was imperative to weaken the enemy

25 Georgios Chatzelis also indicated this when he described night attacks which, despite some moral doubts of the author of *Sylloge Tacticorum*, were gladly used by Roman commanders because they resulted in smaller casualties. Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 118–119.

26 Strat. 7A. pr. 45–53.

27 The subject of war as perceived by the Christian Empire throughout the ages was described in: Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World*, 13–33.

28 In the introduction to Book VII, the author of *Strategikon* compares war to a military vessel and the commander to a helmsman, stating that: *A ship cannot sail without a helmsman, and an adversary cannot be defeated without tactics and strategy*. Strat. 7. Introduction.

29 Which is not to say that warfare was completely absent from the liturgy of the eastern Church. Services were conducted both to bring about a peaceful resolution to war, as well as to ensure victory and success for the emperor in military campaigns. See: Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World*, 21–22; Paul Stephenson, “The Imperial Theology of Victory,” in *A Companion to the Byzantine Culture of War, ca. 300–1204*, ed. Yannis Stouraitis (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 23–58. And from the Emperor's point of view where religion played a very important role in the imperial ideology: Athanasios Markopoulos,

beforehand, with open battle being the final solution. This does not mean that it was pacifism, while the question of the Christian influence on this concept of fighting remains open. The doctrine presented was simply the most economical asset management. Commanders were not expected to avoid fighting at any cost, but to aim to weaken the enemy to make combat less costly.³⁰

Also, it should be pointed out that hunting (κυνηγέσιον), to which warfare was so poetically compared, also held military significance³¹ and was treated as a type of military exercise.³² Fighting and tracking game both require guile, focus and commitment. The quoted fragment demonstrates the idea that later dominated the Eastern Roman approach to warfare.³³ The author reveals himself as surprisingly humane, clearly emphasizing that although war is a bloody business, the primary task of the commander is to defeat the enemy, preferably by means other than combat, at the same time suffering the least possible casualties.³⁴ An army should not engage the enemy face to face, since the risk of open battle is unnecessary, and even achieving victory in such battle is merely empty glory (κενήν ὑπόληψιν φέρουσαν) if the enemy could have been defeated by other means. The art of command was to win the day, losing as few soldiers as possible, often by employing non-military, intelligent stratagems (σόφισμα).³⁵ Interestingly enough, the word used in this passage does not have only positive connotations and could just as well be translated as “devious tricks”. This means that in order to achieve victory a *strategos* was allowed to use the whole range of military tools of the trade, putting the lives of his men

“The Ideology of War in the Military Harangues of Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos,” in *Byzantine war ideology between Roman imperial concept and Christian religion*, ed. Johannes Koder and Ioannis Stouraitis (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2012), 47–56. See the large number of religious rituals before the ruler set off to war: *Constantini Porphyrogeniti tres tractatus de expeditionibus militaribus imperatoris*, (B) 80–91 and after his glorious return (the example of emperors Basil I and Teophilos): *Constantini Porphyrogeniti tres tractatus de expeditionibus militaribus imperatoris*, (C) 724–884.

30 Much on the subject in Theotokis, *Byzantine Military Tactics*, 26–41.

31 For more on the military importance of hunting, see: Strat. 12D.

32 See: Anna Kotłowska, *Zwierzęta w kulturze literackiej Bizantyńczyków* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2013), 27–70.

33 This attitude was still present in Roman military thought in the 11th century. See Theotokis, *Byzantine Military Tactics*, 33–34.

34 See: Veg. 3. 9. This idea appears in a more developed form in *Strategikon*, where the author suggested to first ensure the safety of your own troops, and only then attempt to undermine the enemy’s plans. Strat. 7. Introduction.

35 See, e.g.: καὶ νῦν ἐφ’ ἡμᾶς ταῦτά παρόντα σοφίσματα. Thucydides, *Historiae*, 6. 77. Or, in a similar tone, Euripides: Euripides, *Bacchae*, 489. See also Wheeler, *Strategem and the Vocabulary of Military Trickery*, 27.

above personal honor and glory. Interestingly, this attitude started to change visibly in the 11th century when honor in combat and personal bravery started to gain importance.³⁶ As early as in the 10th century, commanders who won open combat by applying stratagems were widely praised.³⁷

However, some methods, while undeniably effective, were banned as not befitting a Christian commander. A prime example comes from *Sylloge Tacticorum* where the author described precisely how a plague broke out and spread among soldiers and civilians alike.³⁸ It was a cunning and treacherous scheme: the plague was spread by purposely infecting and then releasing captives, whose unwitting mission was to further infect the people who wanted to help them. At the end of the chapter, the author stipulated clearly that this and similar stratagems were not to be used by Roman *strategoï*, but only served as a warning. In the author's opinion, this procedure or even knowledge of it did not benefit Christians.³⁹

Syrianus Magister would go even further down the path trodden by the author of *Strategikon*, claiming that war was the worst evil, necessary only because of the belligerent nature of Rome's neighbors.⁴⁰ So, according to the suggestions of Syrianus and the author of *Strategikon*, a good leader had to know when to engage in open battle, which was always tempting fate to some extent,⁴¹ and when to employ stratagems that could help avoid unnecessary casualties.⁴² A Roman general, apart from safeguarding the interests of his

36 See for example Leonora Neville, "A history of the caesar John Doukas in Nikephoros Bryennios' Material for History," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 32/2 (2008): 168–188. Here especially 176–178 and the description of John's heroic fight against the forces of Roussel de Bailleul. To a large extent, it was the influence of Western military doctrine; see Jonathan Shepard, "The uses of the Franks in eleventh-century Byzantium," *Anglo-Norman Studies* 15 (1993): 275–305; Georgios Theotokis, "Rus, Varangian and Frankish mercenaries in the service of the Byzantine Emperors (9th–11th c.) – Numbers, Organisation and Battle Tactics in the operational theatres of Asia Minor and the Balkans," *Byzantina Symmeikta* 22 (2012): 125–156.

37 Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 77.

38 *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 59. 1–2.

39 *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 59. 3. On the other hand, the author of the same treatise did not see anything wrong in murdering the enemy's captives or sentencing them to death by starvation. *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 50. 8.

40 Syrianus, 4. 9–14. Consequently, according to Syrianus, it was the duty of every citizen to protect the state and its inhabitants, be it by sword, action or any other means. The author of the treatise fulfilled his obligation to defend the homeland by writing a manual of tactics to be used by army commanders.

41 Strat. 8B. 4 and 8B. 86.

42 Among other things, this is why controlling mountain passes was so important for defending the Empire's borders. See more in: Kiril Marinov, "Как трябва да се водят планински сражения. Препоръки в някои византийски и антични стратегикони,"

hometown, had to keep in mind that he was also responsible for the lives of his subordinates. This attitude further developed in later years to include the civilian population, whose well-being and safety was entrusted to the *strategoi* of each theme.⁴³ If an enemy could be hurt without risking the lives of Christian soldiers and civilians, then that was the correct course of action to take; as far as Roman military treatises were concerned, the concept of honor did not apply in war.⁴⁴

In the introduction to Book VII of *Strategikon* we can also read about the role of the commander and his attitude towards the enemy.⁴⁵ Although the passage is rather lengthy, it is worth bringing up in full, as it provides insight into what was considered the proper behavior for a Roman general on a military campaign. In the context of this study, the passage is invaluable, since the author also makes a reference to psychological factors on the battlefield:

A smart strategos studies the opponent before committing to war, so that he knows the strengths of the enemy and can exploit the weaknesses. For example, if the enemy outnumbers you in cavalry, you should destroy their fodder. If they outnumber you in men, cut them off from supplies. If their army consists of different peoples, sow chaos among them using gifts, favors and promises. If there is discord among them, set their commanders against one another. If they rely on spearmen, lure them into

Bulgaria Mediaevalis 4–5 (2013/2014): 363–381, and especially an excellent synthesis of the subject in military treatises: Marinow, “Mountain warfare in the Byzantine-Bulgarian military struggles,” 95–107.

43 *De velitatione bellica*, 12, 4–15.

44 The concept of honor started to play a role in Roman military doctrine as late as in the Middle Byzantine period and gained in importance in the late Byzantine period. See, e.g. the influence of western warcraft on the Empire in the final ages of its existence: Savvas Kyriakidis, *Warfare in Late Byzantium 1204–1453* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 56–60; Chatzeli, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 76–77. An interesting description of differences, although currently in need of an update, was provided in: Martin George Arbagi, *Byzantium in Latin Eyes: 800–1204*. PhD diss., Rutgers State University, 1970. However, as has been accurately pointed out by Savvas Kyriakidis, in the 10th and especially 11th century this actually became the norm on the battlefield. With regard to later periods we cannot discount the impact of the western culture of warfare. Although in the descriptions of Byzantine historians usually only the prominent characters of commanders exhibited heroic traits in the field, and the phenomenon of single combat itself was closely tied to the emergence of the military aristocracy class within the Byzantine society. Savvas Kyriakidis, “Accounts of single combat in Byzantine historiography: 10th–14th centuries,” *Acta Classica* 59 (2016): 114–136.

45 This passage will be mentioned again when talking about the features of an ideal Roman military leader.

difficult terrain. If they rely on bowmen, give battle on open ground and move into close combat. If you fight against the Huns or the Scythians, launch your attacks in February or March, when their horses are in poor condition after the winter, and otherwise follow instructions for engaging enemies that favor the bow. If your opponents march and set up camps without proper caution, launch surprise attacks by day and by night. If they are reckless and undisciplined in combat, and not used to harsh conditions, make them think that you're preparing for an attack, but draw out your preparations so that their anger subsides and once they begin to hesitate, then strike against them. And if the enemy has more infantry, surround them at a distance on open ground and make use of your own javelins.⁴⁶

The Roman commander, or *strategos* (στρατηγός)⁴⁷ had to be cautious; his job was to hurt the enemy in every possible way, preferably without putting any of his own men at risk. The above introduction to combat stratagems⁴⁸ encapsulates the philosophy of the Roman school of tactics. The enemy was to be obstructed by any means available, while an open battle was seen as the final blow, inherently risky. Rather than engaging directly, Romans were supposed to cut off the enemy's supplies, mentally exhaust their soldiers by pretending to get ready for a fight, and to take advantage of natural features of the terrain to achieve victory. An officer in charge had to educate himself about his adversaries,⁴⁹ their strengths and weaknesses, and eventually make use of this knowledge in the field. The author of *Strategikon* emphasized that any weakness on the part of the enemy absolutely had to be exploited in order to achieve success. There were barely a handful of principles that were not to be broken;⁵⁰ the first and foremost obligation of a commander was to defeat

46 Strat. 7. pr. 25–45.

47 In Late Antiquity the Latin title of *magister militum* was often replaced with the Greek term *strategos*. According to the definition coined by the author of *Strategikon*, a *strategos* was an independent army commander. Strat. 1. 3. 10–13.

48 See, for example: Whately, *Battles and Generals*, 99–101.

49 This is what would explain the inclusion of a Book on the neighbors of the Empire in *Strategikon*. The reader was to be educated not only on the Roman army, but also on the customs of its enemies Anthony Kaldellis, *Ethnography After Antiquity: Foreign Lands and Peoples in Byzantine Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 82–88.

50 Mainly it was prohibited to go back on a word given to an opponent under oath, which was strongly emphasized by the author of *Strategikon*. If an agreement was reached, signed and cemented, with oaths made before God, you were not allowed to breach it under any circumstances. Strat. 8A. 36.

the enemy and minimize losses. So, for a general setting out on a campaign against the barbarians, one of the main things to do was to find out as much as possible about his opponent's behavioral patterns and tactics.⁵¹ And then, to put this knowledge into practice. Since the opposing side could potentially capture a Roman soldier, the officer in charge had to make sure beforehand that any scouts sent out in the field looked as impressive as possible, so that the mere sight of them and their equipment would strike fear into the hearts of the enemy. During war, any trick could be used if it gave an advantage to the Romans without putting soldiers at risk. In Late Antiquity, a great commander was not someone who won the day, after a bloody battle, but rather someone who forced the enemy to retreat without a fight. It is also worth remembering that war was a means by which the Chosen Nation, led by the Emperor, appointed by God, defended itself against outside danger and strived for peace.⁵² One expression of this belief was the fact that soldiers were sometimes referred to as *theophylaktoi* – “guarded by God”.⁵³ Syrianus Magister held that war was the greatest evil, but that the neighbors of the Empire forced Romans to fight in defense of their homeland and in order to maintain and extend Roman Supremacy.⁵⁴

The Roman approach to warfare on the threshold of the Middle Ages is an intriguing exception in the context of studies on the origins of military conflicts. Scholars such as Steven Pinker,⁵⁵ Joshua Goldstein,⁵⁶ or Azar Gat⁵⁷ have spent years on interdisciplinary studies focused on the ebb and flow of conflicts throughout the ages, particularly in how they relate to modern

51 This is why *Strategikon* has a whole Book devoted to the customs of neighboring peoples.

52 J. Haldon concluded that according to this philosophy every war waged by the Empire was tied to religion, which in his opinion made the doctrine of a holy war completely redundant. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World*, 23. Defeats suffered by imperial armies were perceived in the same context and treated as expressions of divine wrath for the sins of the Chosen Nation of God. See the same author: Haldon, “Fighting for Peace,” 492–512 and a key text Stouraitis, “‘Just War’ and ‘Holy War,’” 227–265.

53 Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World*, 23.

54 Syrianus, 4, 9–14. Which is consistent with the concept of a just war, i.e. war in defense of your home country.

55 Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why War Has Declined* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011).

56 Joshua Goldstein, *Winning the War on War: The decline of Armed Conflict Worldwide* (New York: Plume, 2012).

57 Azar Gat, *War in Human Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). and Azar Gat, *The Causes of War & the Spread of Peace But will war rebound?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

times.⁵⁸ The results of this research indicate that although war has accompanied mankind since the beginning of time, it is closely linked to civilizational growth and human desires⁵⁹ (which is, of course, a monumental simplification of an extremely extensive chain of arguments). Of course, this situation must have also affected the authors of military treatises; social, religious and state influences intertwined in theoretical literature, resulting in a specific doctrine of employing the imperial army in the most economical way. It was not a defensive doctrine, because the same methods were applied in combat beyond the Empire's borders. In any situation, a commander was responsible for weakening the enemy with all the means at his disposal, joining battle only when it was unavoidable, or when the enemy was so weak that victory was in fact secured. As Salvatore Cosentino rightly noted, the authors of military treatises did not get involved in deep philosophical considerations of "why wage war" but rather "how to wage war".⁶⁰ A Roman commander's task was not to avoid combat, but to engage in it to inflict the heaviest possible casualties on enemy troops, at the same time minimizing his own casualties. Typically, this resulted in avoiding open battle and seeking victory through ruses and guerilla tactics. Following Cosentino's reasoning, in Byzantine military literature combat was not an act of courage or physical strength; rather, it was an exercise in understanding, planning and training. Combat was still perceived this way by Constantinople intellectuals⁶¹ in the late 11th and early 12th century, as beautifully described by Anna Comnena.⁶²

Romans understood the need for warfare, but fighting was to be a last resort and not the default solution, being reserved for cases when conflictual behavioral strategy was judged to be more promising than peaceful competition and cooperation for achieving any object of human desire.⁶³ Despite the Christian legacy, which involved an aversion to violence, the Roman doctrine did not advocate avoiding combat, while the *Roman Oecumene* concept gave the emperors residing in Constantinople the right to armed intervention in order to uphold Roman Supremacy. On the other hand, the doctrine presented

58 Although they seek the causes of war in the earliest history of man, in hunter-gatherer communities.

59 As opposed to international relations theory, which in general focuses solely on enabling conditions. Gat, *The Causes of War*, 248.

60 Cosentino, "Writing about war in Byzantium," 91–92.

61 Notably, since the mid-11th century the Byzantine army started to change considerably, while tactical discipline was increasingly replaced by a culture of bravery and courage. For the fall of classical Roman warfare in the 11th century, see John Birkenmeier, *The Development of the Komnenian Army: 1018–1180* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 139–163.

62 Anna Comnena, *Alexias*, 15. 2. 9–12.

63 Gat, *The causes of war*, 248.

in military treatises advocated success at the smallest cost to oneself. In this situation, in Late Antiquity open battle was always an unnecessary risk, while the concept of honor on the battlefield was a complicating factor, at best.⁶⁴ However, we should distinguish between a commander's honor, a soldier's honor and the honor of a unit with its signs and history. The *strategoï* were tasked with weakening the enemy, dampening their will to fight, tormenting them with hit-and-run tactics, night attacks, dwindling supplies, employing envoys, deserters, civilians, captives and scouts. In fact, any method was allowed to ensure success; it was most spectacular when the enemy was defeated with no losses to oneself. This makes the Roman theory of warfare in Late Antiquity something truly unique,⁶⁵ as exemplified by the mature statement of Syrianus Magister, who begins the section on what his duties to the state are as an author with the following words:

I understand fully that war is a great evil, the greatest there is.⁶⁶

It was a deeply humane approach, however, the question remains open to what extent the doctrine of deploying troops was affected by Christian faith and the Empire's political, economic and demographic situation. The military treatises do not provide answers to these questions, as their authors focused not on "why wage war" but "how to wage war".

64 The role of honor grew in the middle Byzantine period to become one of the factors defining a warrior in the late Byzantine period. See Paul Magdalino, "Honour among Rhomaioi: The Framework of Social Values in the World of Digenes Akrites and Kekaumenos," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 13 (1989): 183–218.

65 On the need of peace and remorse related to war and death, see Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 260–80.

66 Syrianus, 4. 9.

Fighting Fear

War seems sweet only to those, who have not experienced it.¹



1 Fear as a Psychological Factor on the Battlefield

As has already been mentioned several times, fear is one of the most acute stressors, and much of military life is spent looking for ways to block it. The people of Antiquity were fully aware of its destructive power, which is why both in Roman and in Greek culture one of the most esteemed qualities was valor/courage (*virtus*/²ἀρετή)³ that stood in opposition to fear. This belief was so strong, Aristotle himself stated that masculinity (ἀνδρεία) is the balance

¹ Veg. 3, 12.

² The term *virtus* can be understood in two ways. In the classic, Republican sense, it was closely related to the militarized society of the period. Physical strength, audacity and courage, especially on the field of battle, were highly valued by the Romans, and became desirable qualities, characteristic of any true, red-blooded Roman (*virilis-virtus*), but also of the Romans as a whole. Catalina Balmaceda, *Virtus Romana. Politics and Morality in the Roman Historians* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 16–19. This, among other things, is why *virtus* was always depicted as a warrior. However, this approach to the concept of *virtus* limits its extensive meaning merely to the sphere of the battlefield, and individual or collective courage. In the context of this study, understanding *virtus* simply as an individual's physical courage would be an error, which is why it is analyzed here in relation to another term, i.e. *virtus*/ἀρετή. This is particularly relevant for evaluating the qualities of a perfect commander, whose *virtus* was not only about personal courage, but was a more complex idea, encompassing wisdom, prudence, respect for the lives of his subordinates and other qualities that are described in depth in the chapter devoted to the subject. In this instance, we should rather treat *virtus* similarly to the Greek idea of *arete*, in which courage is merely a component piece of a semantically wider concept. Already in the Republican era, the notion of *virtus*, changing under the influence of the Greek civilization, was expanded, and referred to a quality of man, but in quite general terms. Balmaceda, *Virtus Romana*, 19; Myles McDonnell, "Roman Men and Greek Virtue" in *Andreia: Studies in Manliness and Courage in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Ralph Rosen and Ineke Sluiter (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 235–262. And it evolved further, influenced by the Greek *arete*, acquiring a deeper moral context.

³ See more in: Karen Bassi, "The Semantics of Manliness in Ancient Greece," in *Andreia: Studies in Manliness and Courage in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Ralph Rosen and Ineke Sluiter (Leiden:

between bravery ($\theta\rho\acute{\alpha}\sigma\omicron\varsigma$) and fear ($\phi\acute{o}\beta\omicron\varsigma$).⁴ A man worthy of being called *andreios* was to maintain moderation in both these qualities.⁵ Establishing social norms regarding masculinity,⁶ or Roman *virtus*, was important for the citizens, especially those who in the event of an armed conflict would be called upon to serve in the military.⁷ It was even more important during the republican period, when both Greek and Roman armies were comprised of citizen-soldiers, so any established social norms would also affect the military sphere.⁸ Although the meaning behind the Roman term *virtus*⁹ was constantly evolving, we should remember that the idea itself was present in the general public consciousness during the imperial period, even if it applied mostly to the state's elites, rather than common soldiers.¹⁰ At this moment it is worth pointing out that in the treatise by Vegetius *virtus* appears only once, in the context of military sayings.¹¹ None of the fragments that refer to the soldiers' courage include the term *virtus*; it is usually replaced with the word *audacia*.¹² This is the result of the already mentioned process that began in

Brill, 2003), 25–58. Regarding the influence of Hellenism on the Roman understanding of *virtus*, see: McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, 259–265.

- 4 *Ethica Eudemia*, 1228a26–30a37; 1230a26–33; Marguerite Deslauriers, “Aristotle on Andreia, Divine and Sub-human Virtues,” in *Andreia: Studies in Manliness and Courage in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Ralph Rosen and Ineke Sluiter (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 187–212.
- 5 See, more extensively, in: Bassi, “The Semantics of Manliness in Ancient Greece,” 53–54; Daniel Putman, “Philosophical roots of the concept of courage,” in *The psychology of courage: Modern research on an ancient virtue*, ed. Cynthia L.S. Pury and Shane J. Lopez (London: Springer, 2010), 10–13.
- 6 Michael Edward Stewart has recently presented the issue of masculinity in a military context in the period in question. See Michael Edward Stewart, *The Soldier's Life: Martial Virtues and Manly Romanitas in the Early Byzantine Empire* (Leeds: Kismet Press, 2016), 43–61.
- 7 An excellent analysis of martial *virtus* for the time of the Republic in McDonnell, “Roman Men and Greek Virtue,” 238–240.
- 8 Stewart, *The Soldier's Life*, 43–47.
- 9 See the various concepts of *virtus* in reference to war stratagems: Wheeler, *Stratagem and the Vocabulary of Military Trickery*, 55, 100.
- 10 This process began already in the middle republican period, when *virtus* started to be treated as a characteristic trait of Roman aristocracy, rather than common citizens. McDonnell, *Roman Manliness*, 242–247. In the imperial period, this changing perception became fact, although we should remember that in the case of the army the idea of a soldier's *virtus* was heavily influenced by the introduction of professional military service and by moving away from the concept of citizen soldiers.
- 11 *Amplius iuvat virtus quam multitudo*.
- 12 It is interesting to note that authors writing in Greek did not avoid linking *arete* to war and sometimes even identified it as the quality that determined success in battle. This was done, e.g. by Procopius of Caesarea when describing the wars with the Goths. See: Whately, *Battles and Generals*, 177–182.

the middle of the republican times, whereby the meaning of *virtus* morphed from a feature attributed to soldiers into a collection of character traits reserved for the Roman elite. This does not mean that the republican ethos of *virtus* was not present in the work in spirit, as evidenced by the later reception of Vegetius's work.¹³

In Roman theoretical works, the issue of bravery was important, yet tactics and discipline on the battlefield would have always been given precedence over the individual features of soldiers.¹⁴ Courage was defined as a battlefield factor impacting a bigger and much more complicated whole.¹⁵ This was the case in Late Antiquity, as well as in the theoretical literature written in the Middle Byzantine period.¹⁶ The importance of individual traits of soldiers on the battlefield grew together with the increasing significance of Western mercenaries in the emperor's service in the 11th century.¹⁷

Roman authors of military treatises dealt with the issue of fear in different ways, either by devoting a large portion of their work to the subject, like the author of *Strategikon*, or by marginalizing the topic, as in the works of Vegetius and, at least partially, Syrianus. Nevertheless, the issue is noticeable in every work, which illustrates that Roman military theoreticians were very conscious about these matters, and fully aware of the significance of fear on the battlefield, as it affected the morale of not only individual soldiers, but the whole military community. However, before the commanders could improve the spirits of their subordinates, they first had to employ a wide array of tricks to suppress their fears. This was a crucial factor¹⁸ that directly correlated to the troops' combat-readiness and often proved the deciding factor between victory and defeat. A soldier paralyzed with fear ceased to be effective, and this attitude could spread, leading the whole army to ruin. So, before the officer in charge could begin to shape the perceptions of his men, he would need to deal with their fear first. And a soldier before a battle was afraid of many

13 Allmand, *The De Re Militari of Vegetius*, 94.

14 George T. Dennis, "Byzantines in battle," in *Το εμπόλεμο Βυζάντιο (9ος–12ος αι.) / Byzantium at War (9th–12th c.)*, ed. Kostas Tsiknakis (Athens: Goulandri-Horn Foundation, 1997), 165–178.

15 Cosentino, "Writing about war in Byzantium," 93–94.

16 See, for example, very shrewd comments in Michael Edward Stewart, "Breaking Down Barriers: Eunuchs in Italy and North Africa, 400–620," in *Byzantine Culture in Translation*, ed. Amelia Robertson Brown and Bronwen Neil (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 46.

17 Kyriakidis, "Accounts of single combat," 114–136; Theotokis, *Byzantine Military Tactics*, 37–41.

18 Other factors include, e.g.: hatred of the enemy, patriotism, or specific ideologies (in this case also religious differences, military ideals, etc.). See more in: Anthony Kellett, *Combat Motivation: The Behaviour of Soldiers in Battle* (Berlin: Springer, 1982), 165–200.

things – death, the enemy, being wounded, but also whether he would meet the expectations of his commander and fulfill his obligations towards his brothers-in-arms. Going through our selected sources in chronological order, let us first look at how Vegetius saw the issue of fear before combat:

On the day of the battle you must carefully and thoroughly inspect the spirits of those men who are to go into the field. You will be able to see either confidence or anxiety in their facial expressions, in how they speak, how they walk and move. Do not put too much trust in recruits, seemingly eager to fight, since war seems sweet only to those, who have not experienced it yet. But if you observe that even experienced soldiers are fearful before the engagement, it is better to delay it.¹⁹

It is rather surprising that the work of Vegetius includes such intriguing and insightful observations about human nature, although in fact only a relatively small part of the work is devoted to these matters.²⁰ Paragraph twelve in book three is fully focused on the subject of evaluating the army's morale before a battle. It is worth emphasizing that the author saw this as a specific problem, and so dealt with it in a separate paragraph. The insights found in this passage are timeless and could easily be applied to contemporary conflicts and armed forces.²¹ Soldiers before combat were gripped with fear, or even terror (*formido*),²² and it was the commander's role to understand these emotions and help his subordinates overcome them. The leader was to personally and carefully²³ assess the army's morale by observing and talking to his men. The very fact that the commander himself was participating in preparations before the clash would have lifted the spirits of the soldiers; especially if the officer in charge was widely respected and believed to be fortunate. Vegetius

19 Veg. 3. 12.

20 We should bear in mind that the purpose of Vegetius's work was to restore the former glory of the legions by increasing the importance of heavy infantry. So, it was not a typical military treatise, and the moralizing character is evident on every page. This results in certain aspects of military life having been pushed to the background.

21 See, e.g.: Anthony Kellett, *Combat Motivation: The Behaviour of Soldiers in Battle* (Berlin: Springer, 1982), 215–225.

22 TLL 6, p. 1094. TLL VI, p. 1096 (also as fear of water). See, for example: *ex ignoracione rerum ipsa horribiles existunt formidines*. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *de Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*, 1. 19. 63.

23 The word *diligens* can be translated in several ways, and it was likely Vegetius's intent to smuggle in additional subtext. The commander was to be thorough, but also careful and smart in assessing the attitude of his men, which highlights the key importance of this process before a clash.

differentiates between two separate categories of warriors, based on age and previous campaign experience. In the first category there were the overconfident (*fiducia*),²⁴ battle-greedy youngsters, with no military experience; the second comprised veterans (experienced soldiers – *exercito*), used to the sight of blood and violence. Rookie soldiers were eager to fight, but they were untrustworthy, not only due to their lack of combat experience, but also emotional vulnerability. Veterans were better at processing their own emotions, and also knew how to evaluate the chances of success in the coming battle; their confidence was a significant boost to the morale of the unit as a whole. Before an inevitable clash, it was the commander's duty to inspect his soldiers' feelings, and in so doing confirm if they were ready for battle. This could have been achieved by observing and talking to members of the two aforementioned groups. The way they moved and talked would show the commander if they were ready for battle and confident in their abilities, or if they were paralyzed by anxiety, seeking to flee the battlefield at the first opportunity.

The advice given by Vegetius was very practical. An army could only fight if it was mentally prepared, and the commander was responsible for this. If the soldiers were fearful of the enemy, it could prevent them from acting and affect the outcome of the entire engagement. Vegetius's suggestion was to observe veteran soldiers, whose actions had the biggest impact on the result of the battle, and whose behavior directly influenced their less experienced peers, and then to decide whether to fight or retreat based on the morale of the army as a whole. Youngsters were keen to fight, not understanding the challenges that it brings, and so unfazed by the thought of confronting the enemy. In such situations, when dealing with inexperienced men,²⁵ we can easily observe how conformity works. Young soldiers hide their fears behind a mask of bravado, which gets reinforced by other members of the group, and can potentially dominate all of them. This bravado may then transform into battle frenzy, which could pose a serious threat to tactical discipline²⁶ for any army dependent on fighting in tight formation.²⁷ On the other hand, bravado

24 TLL 4, p. 205. On the subject of confidence in one's own abilities, see e.g.: *mirabundi, unde tanta audacia, tanta fiducia sui victis ac fugatis ...* Titus Livius, *Ab Urbe condita*, 25, 37.

25 This holds true for privates and commanders alike.

26 The importance of training and coordination of units was noted by McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 217–224.

27 Rage and recklessness were emotions reserved for heroes and characters in epics, not common soldiers, who were supposed to maintain tactical discipline. You need look no further than Homer's heroes and their behaviors on the battlefield. See: Marcel Détienne, "La Phalange: problemes et controversies," in *Problèmes de la guerre en Grèce ancienne*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant (Paris: De Gruyter, 1968), 121–122. And also, the work of Maria Daraki, where the heroes from Homer's verses were compared to berserkers: Maria Daraki, "Le

on the battlefield could have stemmed from a sense of honor, the search for a glorious death or the desire to enhance one's chances in any subsequent combat.²⁸ Recklessness on the battlefield can be just as dangerous as fear,²⁹ and in the case of the Roman army it presented the additional threat of soldiers breaking ranks, since any man who charged to attack the enemy without a clear order would disrupt the formation and expose all his brothers-in-arms to danger.³⁰ Psychologists have diagnosed such situations in similar vein; J. Pieter stated that if a feeling of bravery was evoked based on fear and anger, the natural side effects will include bravado,³¹ overconfidence and a belligerent attitude, along with slandering, belittling, sarcasm and irony.³² Pieter's work is not about such extreme experiences as close-quarters combat, and focuses on the individual, but we can easily apply his conclusions to group behaviors that were described by the authors of ancient military treatises. A fighting man acting with bravado, which is largely the result of fear of the enemy, can very suddenly change his attitude – all it takes is for the factors that are affecting him to change (death of a comrade in battle,³³ having their morale weakened by an enemy's stratagem, etc.). If this happens, overconfidence can quickly turn into panic, which will once again be reinforced by conformity, combined with the panic that already occurs on the battlefield. Consequently, a group of men who previously acted with bravado, but were in fact masking their hidden fears, will start fleeing to safety once these masks drop. In order to prevent soldiers from

héros à menos et le héros daimoni isos: une polarité homérique," *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore de Pisa* 10 (1980): 1–24.

- 28 See Whately, *Battles and Generals*, 169–71. For a subsequent period: Triantafyllitsa Maniati-Kokkini, "Η επίδειξη ανδρείας στον πόλεμο κατά τους ιστορικούς του 11ου και 12ου αι," in *Το εμπόλεμο Βυζάντιο (9ος–12ος αι.) | Byzantium at War (9th–12th c.)*, ed. Kostas Tsiknakis (Athens: Goulandri-Horn Foundation, 1997). 239–259.
- 29 The issue of fear and bravado has already been studied in the classic work by Lord Moran. See more in the latest edition: Wilson, *The Anatomy of Courage*. Compare also with more contemporary experiences, especially remarks on reasons for initiating fights, found in two chapters in: Marshall, *Men Against Fire*, 138–178. Also refer to the fascinating take on this subject exemplified by Procopius of Caesarea, who did not assign purely negative connotations to bravado, unless it manifested itself in conjunction with factors like disorder and disobedience: Whately, *Battles and Generals*, 96.
- 30 In the military law provisions included in *Strategikon*, fleeing from the battlefield and attacking the enemy without a direct order were seen as equal offences punishable by death. *Strat.* 1. 8. 16.
- 31 This was pointed out by Procopius, who noted that morale built on anger may lead to tragic consequences, especially if soldiers were blinded by rage θυμῷ πολλῷ. See more in: Whately, *Battles and Generals*, 96–97.
- 32 Pieter, *Strach i odwaga*, 185; McGurk, Castro, "Courage in Combat," 167–169.
- 33 This is one of the most acute stressors, often the cause of PTSD after combat. Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 82–85.

fleeing, Vegetius recommended yet another stratagem, quite a simple one at that. Soldiers' shields had to be signed; if a legionary discarded his shield in battle and fled, the commander could easily find and punish the culprit.³⁴

An inexperienced recruit³⁵ on the battlefield was characterized by instability of attitudes and a tendency to switch his behavior between two extremes.³⁶ This was the result of being unfamiliar with combat, and it made the role of mentally-sound veterans that much more important in the army.³⁷ It was only by inspecting those experienced soldiers that a commander could assess if his army was fit for combat. Veterans weighed their chances of success much more realistically, based on their experience in previous engagements. If they were confident, it was a sign to the leader that victory is likely, that the spirits in the army are high and that widespread panic or breakdown of morale should not occur. With a group of veterans in his force convinced that they will win the day, the commander could safely engage the enemy in the hope that their experience and confidence will rub off on the rest of the army, comprised of recruits who had not seen combat. This way, one group could impart their confidence onto the other through personal example. Although the Roman army in the analyzed period was a professional force,³⁸ meaning that the majority of soldiers would have had military experience, the above suggestions could still be applied in practice.

2 Sacramentum militare

Syrianus had another piece of advice for commanders – to additionally reinforce the army's resolve with an oath. On the night before the battle the *strategos* was to gather the troops and have them vow to fight bravely and not

34 Veg. 2. 18.

35 This had been observed already by Vegetius, who claimed that city-born recruits were inferior soldier material, as they were not used to hard work and violence. Veg. 1. 3.

36 It is a typical human quality, blocked among other things by military training.

37 In the case of an army consisting entirely of recruits, the authors of Antiquity advised to first focus on the training of soldiers and familiarizing them with their new role. Sending inexperienced men into combat could have disastrous results. A case in point would be the fate of the Roman army made up of fresh-faced recruits that was defeated by the Goths at Thessaloniki in 380.

38 On the subject of recruitment and issues related to it, see: Philippe Richardot, *La fin de l'armée Romaine 284–476* (Paris: ECONOMICA, 2005), 47–56. For the previous period, and the military career path: Pierre Cosme, *L'armée romaine VIII^e s. av. J.-C.–V^e s. ap. J.-C.* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2007), 103–129. For recruitment and military training in the times of emperor Maurice: Ilkka Syvanne, *The Age of Hippotaxotai Art of War in Roman Military Revival and Disaster (491–636)* (Tampere: Tampere University Press, 2004), 28–41.

to flee. The military oath (*sacramentum militare*)³⁹ was an old Roman⁴⁰ way of confirming the loyalty of the army, and was often employed as additional motivation or a method to strengthen the soldiers' determination.⁴¹ The fact was noted, e.g. by Mark Hebblewhite, who emphasized that it was one of the principal and most effective methods of reinforcing the soldier's devotion to the person of the emperor.⁴² He goes on to note that in pagan times the oath's effectiveness⁴³ was further strengthened by the fear of the gods, and the social stigma of breaking one's word, once given. *Sacramentum* also brought the unit closer together and cemented unit cohesion,⁴⁴ as pointed out by Libanios when describing the oath sworn by Julian's forces.⁴⁵ This also happened during military campaigns; for example, before entering Persian territories in 586, soldiers had to swear an oath to *strategos* Philippicus confirming their willingness to fight.⁴⁶ The oath taken during a campaign could be naturally reinforced by means of gifts for the soldiers and promises made by the commander or

39 See the classical text Franz J. Dölger, "Sacramentum Militiae," *Antike und Christentum* 2 (1930): 268–280.

40 Frontinus, 4. 1. 4. The author made a point that, before the consulates of Lucius Aemilius Paullus and Gaius Terentius Varro, soldiers swore to each other that they would not leave the other soldiers in the face of the enemy and would only step aside to look for arms. After 215–213 BC, i.e. the consulateship of Gaius Terentius Varro, soldiers had to take a military oath to the consul, rather than to each other, which reflected the republican ethos. See also the consul as a representative of the republic: Titus Livius, *Ab Urbe condita*, 22. 38.

41 Interestingly, before the reign of Constantine the Great, *sacramentum militare* raised strong objections of Christian theologians, who emphasized that a Christian could only serve one lord – God, and thus could not take an oath of obedience to the ruler. This interpretation was put forward especially by Tertulian who was more than willing to use the term *sacramentum* in his works. See especially Tertullianus, *De corona militis*, 15 and about the poor value of oaths taken by pagans to their gods: Tertullianus, *Ad Nationes*, 1. 10. In the case of Tertulian's works, some caution needs to be exercised because the author translated the Greek word *mysterion* as *sacramentum*. See William A. Roo Van, *The Christian Sacrament* (Roma: Gregorian Biblical BookShop, 1992), 37–39; Owen Phelan, *The Formation of Christian Europe: The Carolingians, Baptism, and the Imperium Christianum* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 19–20. Despite the doubts of Daniel G. Van Slyke who defined *De Corona* as a metaphorical text (Daniel Slyke Van, "Sacramentum in Ancient Non-Christian Authors," *Antiphon* 9/2 (2005): 203–204.), a fragment of the work leaves no room for interpretation: a Christian soldier could only serve God, whereas taking a military oath involved loyalty to the ruler as well, and as such was unacceptable.

42 Mark Hebblewhite, *The Emperor and the Army in the Later Roman Empire, AD 235–395* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 159–162.

43 See a summary of a discussion of *homo sacer* in Torres, "Homo Sacer," 22–32.

44 John F. Shean has indicated the importance of the ritual of recruits making *sacramentum*. He perceives it as a transition from civilian to military life. Shean, *Soldiering for God*, 6; 35.

45 Libanios, *Orationes*, 18. 109.

46 Sym. 2. 15.

ruler. *Constantini Porphyrogeniti tres tractatus de expeditionibus militaribus imperatoris* also contains information that in the Middle Byzantine period, during a campaign the emperor should personally present his commanders with purses of gold and hold a feast for the soldiers.⁴⁷ This procedure was, of course, intended to boost the army's morale and ensure obedience to the ruler, as well as the loyalty of the *thémata* officers and their subordinates during a campaign. In the Middle Byzantine period, John I Tzimiskes is said to have rewarded his soldiers with a feast after the battle.⁴⁸ Psellos noted that Bardas Skleros' soldiers were loyal to him because he always ate and drank with them.⁴⁹ Therefore, even narrative sources partly confirm the effectiveness of this behavior.

The *sacramentum militare* could also be renewed; thanks to the papyrus from the time of Severus Alexander discovered in Dura Europos with the text of *Feriale Duranum*,⁵⁰ we know that soldiers did in fact take these oaths many times. The document states that Roman legionnaires renewed them every year, on January 3rd.⁵¹ Another customary moment⁵² when an oath was taken was the enthronement of a new ruler who wanted to win his army's loyalty. The military oath was best described by Vegetius;⁵³ in his narration, the *sacramentum* was part of a bigger ceremony related to the *donativum*.⁵⁴ This means that shortly after swearing the oath, the agreement between the soldiers and the emperor was sealed by a single cash donation. The power of the oath was thus reinforced, while the soldier taking it could be certain that he would be rewarded for keeping the *sacramentum*. We can imagine that if the ritual did not take place in the presence of the emperor himself, it was even more

47 *Constantini Porphyrogeniti tres tractatus de expeditionibus militaribus imperatoris*, (B) 92–100.

48 Leo Diaconus, 8. 10. Leon Diaconus, an expert in human psyche, emphasised the fact that the emperor's actions maintained the soldiers' combat zeal.

49 Psellos, *Chronographia*, 1. 25.

50 It was the calendar of the soldiers of *cohors XX Palmyrenorum* dated to the reign of Severus Alexander (more specifically to the years 224–235), which marks all the principal holidays and official celebratory events. See: *Feriale Duranum*, 1–222. See also in a religious context: Shean, *Soldiering for God*, 49–53.

51 In the opinion of most scholars, the papyrus contained an official calendar of holidays and events celebrated by Roman soldiers throughout the empire. Nigel Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians in Roman Syria* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press: 2000), 142–144.

52 *Sollemniter*. This was emphasized also by Ammianus when Julian was enthroned. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 21. 5. 10.

53 Veg. 2. 5; Lee, *War in Late Antiquity*, 52–53.

54 This has also been covered by Roland Delmaire, *Largesses sacrées et res private* (Rome: Ecole Française de Rome, 1989), 556–557.

elaborate, and the soldiers had to pay homage before the imperial *imago*.⁵⁵ The symbolic significance of this type of ritual should not be underestimated, especially in light of the fact that it took place among all the soldiers, and its power was magnified by a sense of community. Theoretically, in this way the ruler ensured his army's loyalty, although in practice, these types of rituals and bribes⁵⁶ were expected by the soldiers and became an element of a soldier's life. As Mark Hebblewhite rightly noted, using the difference between Maximian and Constantine, a soldier fighting in anticipation of subsequent *donativa*, irrespective of the oaths he took, became a professional fighting for money (*uenales manus*).⁵⁷ A ruler earned his soldiers' true respect through his character and way of exercising power.⁵⁸

It is notable that Syrianus Magister also suggested that the leader swear an oath before the army. The *strategos* was to promise his men rewards for bravery in combat, and, in the event of the soldier's death – that his rewards would be paid out to his family.⁵⁹ Such a vow took on the character of a bilateral agreement concluded before the Christian God, where both the commander as well as the soldiers were expected to fulfill certain obligations. Reinforcing this bond with an oath was symbolic and improved morale as well as unit cohesion – since it all happened within the bounds of a close military community.⁶⁰ Soldiers confirmed their readiness to fight,⁶¹ at the same time declaring that in the face of death they would not run, but valiantly fight on. As a result, this vow taken before the commander also meant that they were giving their word to their comrades. On his part, the commander vowed to pay them rewards,⁶² and in the event of their death – to pass these rewards on to their firstborn. An oath taken by all the legionnaires in a unit was to strengthen unit

55 Hebblewhite, *The Emperor and the Army*, 83–5.

56 Literature from that time contains words referring to a bribe: δῶρα and *largitio*.

57 Literally “a hand for hire,” according to Mark Hebblewhite, simply a mercenary which is, however, unfair. The Roman army was a professional army, which means that the soldiers collected their pay and enjoyed various privileges (in kind and in cash) for their service.

58 Hebblewhite, *The Emperor and the Army*, 85.

59 Syrianus, 39. 2–12. These provisions were applicable for night-fighting, but the custom of swearing oaths has also been confirmed during military campaigns.

60 It is a time-tested truth of the battlefield that men who do not know each other, regardless of their training, courage or experience will fight poorly. Unit cohesion is immensely important, both from a military point of view, as well as in the context of the soldiers' mental health. See: Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 208–221.

61 Frontinus, 4. 1. 4.

62 We should bear in mind that in this instance all soldiers would receive this additional reward, since their task was to attack at night – an operation requiring courage and experience.

identity and cohesion,⁶³ and also stimulate the internal systems of control – soldiers were to be ashamed of retreating before their brothers-in-arms. We also should not discount the religious aspect – the oath was given before God, so anyone breaking it could expect punishment both in this life and in the afterlife. Rewards for valor in battle were to serve as additional motivation, and the promise that they would be passed on to firstborn children or families of the deceased was intended to suppress the fear of people going into combat and to encourage them to take certain risks that could in turn bring commensurable financial gains. This was an ingenious way of motivating your subordinates, encouraging them to modify their personal goals.⁶⁴ A soldier was ashamed to break his promise given to his comrades and flee or avoid combat; also, in exchange for bravery on the battlefield he could expect rewards from the commander; and finally, in the event of his death, the soldier knew that his family would have the means to live on.

3 Fear of the Dark

Soldiers' fear of the dark is an interesting case study. Needless to say, it is an atavistic fear rooted in human nature,⁶⁵ magnifying other stressors and made worse by combat. It can be divided into two categories. The first would be fear of camping in foreign territory so, to a large extent, it was a fear of the unknown. The other category is represented by a fear of fighting at night. Roman commanders and theoreticians used different ways of overcoming night-related fear.⁶⁶ Syrianus' work includes information about oaths and significant rewards for the soldiers attacking the enemy at night as a fear-dispelling

63 Lee, "Morale and the Roman Experience of Battle," 207.

64 Ryan, Deci, "When Rewards Compete with Nature," 14–56.

65 See for example Eleonora Gullone, "The development of normal fear: A century of research," *Clinical Psychology Review* 20/4 (2000): 429–451; Christian Grillon et al. "Darkness facilitates the acoustic startle reflex in humans," *Biological Psychiatry* 42/6 (1997): 453–460. A question arises if it was a fear of the dark or a fear of the night itself. Both fears are atavistic in nature; research indicates that in general, humans are more afraid of the night (i.e. in this case, the night can also be a factor magnifying fear). See Li Yadan et al. "Night or darkness, which intensifies the feeling of fear?" *International Journal of Psychophysiology* 97/1 (2015): 46–57. Fear itself has also been defined a primal: Joanna Bourke, "Fear and Anxiety: Writing about Emotions in Modern History," *History Workshop Journal* 55/1 (2003): 124.

66 The problem of night fighting and the related challenges were presented by Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 77; 113–119. He emphasised the significance of a military camp which gave the soldiers a sense of safety.

enticement.⁶⁷ A night attack on enemy positions required significant courage and discipline, because it was easier to make a mistake at night.⁶⁸ On the other hand, Polyaeus' work includes information that soldiers spending the night on enemy territory would easily panic, and so the commanders had to handle the problem in various ways, the most brutal being an order given by Clearchus to kill every soldier who panicked in the night and rose from his bedding.⁶⁹ A fear of the night and enemy attack was replaced by the fear of inevitable punishment. Interestingly, Byzantine historiographers took note of the art of night fighting and used it frequently in constructing their own narratives. Georgios Chatzelis presented valuable findings on Byzantine troops; in the case of night attack and defeat, very frequently the blame fell on the commander and his lack of experience or downright incompetence.⁷⁰

The authors of *De velitatione bellica*⁷¹ and *Sylloge Tacticorum* recommended taking advantage of the fear of a night spent on enemy territory.⁷² The latter thought, however, that attacking the enemy by night was an act of honor, only if the attacking army was weaker than its enemy. Otherwise, when the forces were comparable, it was an act of dishonor.⁷³ Considering Roman warfare in the 10th century, though, this was antiquated thinking and no military commander launching a night attack worried about honor-related aspects.⁷⁴ Nikephoros II Phokas serves as an excellent example: heading a strong invading army, he attacked the Arabs on Crete by night and won a spectacular victory, and the praise of Leo the Deacon.⁷⁵

If the enemy set up camp for the night on Roman territory, the attack had to be unexpected, in order to disrupt the enemy's tactical organization and damage morale, at the same time leaving open the only safe road into the enemy territory to encourage flight.⁷⁶ Launching such an attack was a demanding task for Roman soldiers, but when it did happen, the results could be outstanding. Suffice to say that troops headed by Leo Phokas launched a night attack

67 Syrianus, 39.

68 The best example is an attack described by Theophylact Simocatta during a night march against the Avars. See abundant literature: Petre Năsturel, "Torna, torna, fratre. O problemă de istorie și de lingvistică," *Studii și cercetări de istorie veche* 7 (1956): 179–188; Barry Baldwin, "Torna, torna, phrater': What Language?," *Byzantion* 67 (1997): 264–268.

69 Polyaeus, 2. 2. 10.

70 Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 115–6.

71 *De velitatione bellica*, 24.

72 *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 48.

73 *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 48. 7; Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 117–9.

74 Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 117–9.

75 Leo Diaconus, 1. 7.

76 *De velitatione bellica*, 24. 14–18.

against some Magyars in the 960s. Although, according to Leo the Deacon, the Roman troops were few and unprepared for fighting, the night attack on a clearly larger force brought about an excellent result with only a handful of Magyars left alive.⁷⁷ Awoken from a sound sleep, in which they were trying to rest their bodies and calm their nerves, the enemy soldiers became easy prey for the Romans. Violently stirred from their slumber and attacked, they thought only of fleeing for their lives rather than fighting. Interestingly, according to the authors of military treatises, some nations were more susceptible to night attacks. For example, the Arabs' fear of setting up camp for a night in foreign territory was strongly emphasized by the author of *Tactica*,⁷⁸ who recommended also other methods of attacking the enemy after nightfall.⁷⁹ In each of these works, the authors emphasized that at night the enemy sought solace and relaxation. When comfort is replaced by sudden danger,⁸⁰ soldiers do not respond by fighting but fleeing. On the one hand, soldiers camping at night were susceptible to enemy night attacks, hence all the information about the art of setting up camp and night watches.⁸¹ When troops were on the offensive, night attacks were an excellent way of decimating a larger enemy army with relatively few casualties. At times, the Romans managed to surprise barbarians in this way; barbarians, who in regular conditions would not have fought but rather retreated. The best example of this type of attack is a night expedition against Slavs under the command of Ardagast – taken by surprise in their sleep, they were forced to fight on the enemy's terms.⁸² This behavior was in compliance with the general spirit of Roman military treatises, which assumed gaining any advantage by all available means. This procedure is mentioned many times in military treatises, which is a clear indication that it was an important element of a soldier's profession.

4 *Esprit de corps*

Commanders tried to develop the soldiers' collective awareness by instilling a sense of belonging to a unit, especially a legion. References to a unit's proud

77 Leo Diaconus, 2. 2.

78 *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 18. 112.

79 See *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 17. 10–16; Syrianus, 39; Strat. 9. 2.

80 The author of the *Tactica* even recommended simulating readiness for fighting for a few successive days and when the enemy's vigilance was duly relaxed, a night attack should have been launched. *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 17. 11.

81 See for example *De Munitionibus Castrorum*; Veg. 3. 2; 3. 8; Strat. 5. 4; 7B. 9; 12B. 22; 12C.

82 Sym. 6. 7. Truth to be told, Ardagast found refuge in a dense forest.

tradition,⁸³ its names, banner or past victories⁸⁴ could be excellent motivating factors that boosted the soldiers' morale before combat. While this behavior was nothing unusual in the time of the Principate or the Dominate, it is hard to say to what extent the underlying reason for it was to influence the soldiers' attitudes⁸⁵ and to what extent it was the imperial ideology of power and conquest. When the situation was the opposite (a legion's defeat), one could expect an equally strong reaction from the central authorities, including stripping a legion of its name and *damnatio memoriae* as the most extreme measure.⁸⁶ Yet again, it was a part of the imperial ideology in which there was no room for defeat. On the other hand, we should not disregard the impact of this situation on a unit's *esprit de corps*.

Making use of the history of the legions and their behavior to shape the emperor's image was an element of the power ideology, but it also directly affected the soldiers. Julius Caesar's behavior is an excellent example of a commander motivating his soldiers by referring to the units' past. Very skillfully, Caesar built up a collective historical awareness in order to manipulate it. The soldiers' sense of pride and *esprit de corps* were very important factors. So important that during a mutiny of the army in Pannonia in AD 14, the soldiers decided against merging three legions, because each of them wanted to keep its name. This is an indication that a legion's name and tradition played a significant role in the soldiers' lives.⁸⁷ The memory of a legions' achievements must have been very vivid among the soldiers; a case in point is Antonius Primus who encouraged soldiers from *Legio III Gallica* by recalling its traditions

83 Valerie Maxfield, *The Military Decorations of the Roman Army* (Berkeley – Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), 103–109; Lawrence Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army: From Republic to Empire* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 132–140.

84 The inverse rule was applied to a unit suffering defeat. A legion could lose its reputation and, in extreme cases, be dissolved, especially when an eagle was lost. There were no strict rules about the fate of a defeated unit. More in Graeme A. Ward, “By Any Other Name: Disgrace, Defeat, and the Loss of Legionary History,” in *Brill's Companion to Military Defeat in Ancient Mediterranean Society*, ed. Jessica H. Clark and Brian Turner (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 284–308.

85 However, the effectiveness of this procedure was confirmed in modern times: in 1757, before the battle of Leuthen, Frederick the Great threatened that he would strip his soldiers of their banners if they fled from the battlefield. The king's threat worked on the commanders, the NCOs and the privates. More in Ilya Berkovich, “Fear, Honour and Emotional Control on the Eighteenth-Century Battlefield,” in *Battlefield Emotions 1500–1800 Practices, Experience, Imagination*, ed. Erika Kuijpers and Cornelis van der Haven (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 97–102.

86 Ward, “By Any Other Name,” 284–309.

87 Brian Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army, 31 BC–AD 235* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 88–93.

and its success under the command of Corbulo and Marcus Antonius.⁸⁸ In the period being studied, the traditions of the legions started to break down, and it was impossible to refer to the past of *ad hoc* units. This does not mean we do not have examples of military traditions at work. Elite formations, especially palace formations,⁸⁹ still boasted a past, while the memory of certain field units and their traditions survived at least until the 6th century. The latter is exemplified by a description of a dying soldier included in Theophylact Simocatta's work; historians have identified the soldier as a *Quartoparthoi* which means that he was a member of *Legio IV Parthica*.⁹⁰ This is substantial evidence that the Roman military tradition survived until Late Antiquity, at least in some units. Nevertheless, the analyzed military treatises do not offer information about stimulating *esprit de corps* by referring to the memory of a unit's past achievements and traditions. However, I need to stress yet again that the absence of this information does not mean that this procedure was alien to Roman commanders in Late Antiquity, it is simply not present in the sources.

5 Fear of the Enemy

The biggest source of stress on the battlefield is the fear of death.⁹¹ This emotion is caused directly by the enemies, who often act in a specific manner to intensify it. The better their level of training and equipment was, the more soldiers they had, the louder they screamed – all this made the opponent that much scarier to the rank-and-file. This fear was frequently reinforced by the use of various tricks aimed at undermining the morale of Roman troops.⁹² One of the core tasks of a Roman commander was to do everything in his power

88 Tacitus, *Historiae*, 3. 24.

89 See for example a classical work by Richard Ira Frank, *Scholae Palatinae. The Palace Guards of the Later Roman Empire* (Rome: American Academy, 1969).

90 Sym. 2. 6. A legion established during the reign of Diocletian. *Notitia Dignitatum* or. 35.24. The legion was stationed in Circesium (Kirkensien). The circumstances of relocation to Beroea (now Aleppo) remain unknown.

91 Innumerable studies were devoted to this topic. Most notably including: Michael Stephenson, *The Last Full Measure: How Soldiers Die in Battle* (London: Penguin Random House, 2016), 1–48 (on the subject of death on ancient battlefields), or: Charles Wilson, *The Anatomy of Courage* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2007), 154–158.

92 Examples include the simple stratagems of Slavic warriors, who charged into combat with terrifying battle cries, and only engaged in battle once the Romans had begun retreating. This aspect of barbarian warfare was already analyzed by myself in a separate piece. See: Różycki, "Fear – elements of Slavic 'Psychological Warfare,'" 23–29.

to make the soldiers overcome their fear of death and the enemy,⁹³ so that they would go into battle thinking about victory. This was a difficult prospect and required Roman *stratego*i to have in-depth knowledge about the human psyche. Suitable competences could be gained by reading military treatises, whose authors compiled the knowledge of past generations, sometimes adding their own personal experiences from military life. In this respect, the treatises written in ancient Greece were still relevant. Although the purely military knowledge could no longer be applied to Late Antiquity, the ways of manipulating your soldiers and methods of influencing the enemy were still something the Romans could use. You could say that, despite the changes in military technology, tactics and strategy, human psychology did not change all that much, which made it possible to use the same methods throughout the ages.⁹⁴ For example, in the 11th century, the mercenaries from the garrison in Edessa were so afraid of the Seljuks that they decided not to face them in an open battle. The following year, when the situation repeated itself, the soldiers stepped out from behind the fortifications, but fled from the battlefield at the very sight of the enemy.⁹⁵ The fear mechanism, fueled by the Seljuks, kept the soldiers in its grip, paralyzing their actions. It is a truism to say that soldiers are afraid of death and combat, but we require a deeper understanding of the mechanisms employed to make fighters want to risk their own lives. Fear on the battlefield was not something shameful in and of itself, provided that soldiers still fulfilled their duties, which is why this chapter will often talk about mastering one's fear, rather than completely blocking it. A good illustration of this attitude can be found in Homer's works, which formed the basis of ancient culture. The characters in the *Iliad* did not have to be ashamed of their feelings on the battlefield,⁹⁶ a soldier could burst into tears at the sight of bloodshed, or express despair after the death of a comrade, but he still had to do his job, or he could otherwise become easy prey for the enemy.⁹⁷

On the subject of overcoming fear and evoking this feeling in the enemy the experiences of Roman commanders were the result of hundreds of years of wars waged by Romans and Greeks against many neighboring peoples. Although

93 According to some veterans, fear of combat is even harder for soldiers to overcome than fear of the enemy, especially in the case of their first battle: Richard Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behavior of Men in Battle* (New York-London: Free Press, 1989), 136–140.

94 What is more, some of the ruses and stratagems described below can still be applied on contemporary battlefields.

95 Matthew of Edessa, 2.2 8.

96 See also the passages cited by H. van Wees: *Iliad* 13. 85. 9; 394–6. 434–8; 16. 401–3.

97 Hans van Wees, *Greek Warfare: Myth and Realities* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2004), 162–163.

the methods of forming a phalanx, or the combat tactics of Thessalian cavalry became outdated, knowledge about human mentality and ways of exploiting its weaknesses was still applicable. A case in point is a story repeated many times⁹⁸ about the behavior of Agesilaus, king of Sparta, during a conflict with Persia.⁹⁹ The Greek soldiers were expected to fear the enemy, which is why their commander showed them the limp bodies of prisoners of war and, later on, the spoils taken from them. In this way he dispelled his soldiers' fear by debasing the enemy's physical strength, at the same time encouraging his troops to fight by promising an easy victory and the prospect of good spoils. Different variants of this procedure were recommended by numerous authors of military treatises as an excellent way of dispelling soldiers' fears and as a way to motivate them before combat.¹⁰⁰ And so, Late Roman military literature, based on experiences of the past, describes a wide array of methods of influencing the minds of soldiers on both sides of the conflict. Some of these have remained applicable even to this day.

The section below will be devoted to ways of affecting your own soldiers, to improve their chances of defeating the opposing force. In particular, it will focus on what was done to block the fear responses in subordinates. Most of the stratagems described are virtually non-existent in sources other than military treatises, which makes it impossible to verify if they were actually used; nevertheless, they present a unique opportunity to look behind the scenes of the warcraft of Antiquity. Interestingly enough, according to the authors of Antiquity,¹⁰¹ mentally preparing the army for combat was one of the most crucial tasks of a commander, and the art of strategy comprised all manner of stratagems and tricks designed to defeat the enemy, even without bloodshed.¹⁰²

The simplest way of handling fear of the enemy could have been the deployment of the army. From the point of view of Roman tactics, an infantry formation could be placed further in the rear to minimize the risk of the first line of soldiers fleeing.¹⁰³ When there was a river or a considerable obstacle in the rear

98 See Polyaeus, 2. 1. 6; Frontinus, 1. 11. 17; Plutarchos, *Agesialos*, 9.

99 Georgios Chatzelis noted an interesting manipulation with this stratagem, although with different players, see Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 76.

100 See also the part of this book dedicated to captives, where I give examples from military treatises.

101 See, in particular, Onasander – frequently quoted and referred to both in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages. Onasander, *Strategikos*, 1; 2.

102 A truly great leader did not gamble with the lives of his men on the field of battle, and could defeat his opponents by various means, both military as well as psychological. Strat. 2. 1.

103 Stephen Morillo took notice of the fact emphasizing that the practice survived for centuries. Morillo, "Expecting Cowardice: Medieval Battle Tactics Reconsidered," 68–69. For

of a formation, the soldiers could not flee but had a sense of safety; the same held true for a fortified camp. Of course, tactically speaking, anchoring an army's flanks or rear on a natural obstacle was correct, often even recommended.¹⁰⁴ However, there were extreme situations¹⁰⁵ when commanders chose to cut off their soldiers' retreat,¹⁰⁶ hoping to replace fear with desperation and additionally motivate the fighters. However, this risky tactic was rarely deployed. The author of the Middle Byzantine treatise *Sylloge Tacticorum* wrote openly that it relied entirely on luck.¹⁰⁷ A similar opinion is expressed in narrative sources from Late Antiquity. Theophylact Simocatta, clearly disgusted, wrote about a decision made by Kardarigan, a Persian commander, who ordered the destruction of his army's water supplies before the Battle of Solachon.¹⁰⁸ His decision was intended to force the Persian troops to put more effort in the fighting, because the Roman troops were blocking access to the river, the only source of drinking water. Resorting to this type of stratagem was nothing less than simply tempting fate, bearing in mind that the Persians had prepared huge numbers of shackles for Roman captives,¹⁰⁹ it was also a sign of over-confidence, as noted by Theophylact Simocatta.¹¹⁰ In the end, the Persian army was crushed and some of the fugitives collapsed from thirst.¹¹¹ On the other hand, a Roman commander was expected to demonstrate prudence and care for his soldiers on a daily basis, as well as before combat.¹¹² While the Roman way of preparing the army for combat was more refined, it did not exclude extreme means in extreme situations.

Greece in the classical period see Roel Konijnendijk, *Classical Greek Tactics. A Cultural History* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 126–138.

104 Veg. 3. 13; 3. 14; 3. 20. To some extent, also Strat. 3. 10.

105 See for example Agesilaus' retreat when cowardly allies were covering the rear while crossing a pass which forced them to fight. Polyaeus, 2. 1. 20.

106 Roman military theoreticians also considered desperation as a motivating factor; but they warned of it during sieges. See for example Polyaeus' references to Agesilaus: Polyaeus, 2. 1. 4–5.

107 *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 10. 1.

108 Sym. 2. 2.

109 Sym. 2. 2.

110 Sym. 2. 2. 1–3. Bearing in mind that the distance between the rivers Buron and Arzamon was not very big and could have been covered within a day, the story about destroying supplies of water can also be viewed as a literary topos. Nevertheless, it was an excellent example of Persian self-confidence and good planning on the part of the Romans. Theophylact emphasized the fact that *strategos* Philippicus planned to cut off the Persians' access to water.

111 Sym. 2. 5.

112 For example Strat. 7. pr. 25–45.

An important aspect of preparation before a battle was familiarizing the army with the sight and fighting methods of their opponents. Fear of the enemy, compounded by lack of information and experience in fighting that enemy, could lead to disastrous results. Although at times, in extreme situations, it could also be motivating. Procopius noted that after landing in Africa, Roman soldiers worked extremely fast to erect a palisade due to their fear of the enemy. So, in this case fear acted as a motivator – Belisarius's men knew that their lives depended on swiftly setting up a fortified camp, and since they were in enemy territory, they could not count on help of any kind.¹¹³ It is human nature to supplement missing knowledge with assumptions, and in a situation leading up to a military engagement, soldiers tend to exaggerate the strength of their opponents. This could result in panic which was not based on any actual facts. To prevent that, it was the commander's task to make his subordinates accustomed to the enemy. This way, troops overcame their fear through extreme exposure. Fighting in small-scale engagements or direct observation were supposed to yield positive results for individual soldiers, and in so doing shape the attitude of the army as a whole.

One method for such mastering of fear was described in the work of Vegetius. If there were relatively more novice soldiers in the army, the author of the treatise suggested forming mixed units, comprising both veterans and inexperienced troops.¹¹⁴ Any such unit should promptly be sent to engage a smaller enemy force, on terms that favored the Romans:

If, for example, it is known that the enemies, feeling secure, have dispersed around the area in search of spoils, then the commander – who wishes to follow these suggestions – should send out a unit consisting in part of reliable horsemen or infantrymen, and in part of recruits or soldiers of lesser skill. Victory achieved by the unit will provide the necessary combat training to the latter group, and another opportunity to show off their valor to the former.¹¹⁵

This example perfectly illustrates that Roman army leaders consciously assisted soldiers in overcoming their fears. Vegetius suggested this stratagem as a way of decreasing anxiety, but also emphasized the benefits that it provided

113 Procopius Caesarensis, *De Bellis*, 3. 15. 31–33.

114 A similar situation has already been described. At any cost, the commander was to avoid sending unprepared recruits into combat.

115 *His, ut oportet, curatis, cum dispersi ad praedandum securi oberrant hostes, tunc probatos equites siue pedites cum tironibus aut inferioribus mittat, ut ex occasione fuis inimicis et illis peritia et reliquis crescat audacia.* Veg. 3. 10.

to both novices and experienced troops. The author wanted commanders to consciously exploit the mechanisms governing the human psyche in order to gain an advantage. An engagement was only advisable if the enemy was overconfident and dispersed his forces. In such case, the Roman commander could prepare a detachment of soldiers with mixed levels of experience and send it to clash with their opponents, while being almost certain of the outcome.¹¹⁶ Less experienced soldiers would improve their skills and become bolder, partially by observing and emulating their longer-serving colleagues. Whereas to the veterans, this would have been yet another test confirming their confidence in their own capabilities and their elite status. What we are seeing here is using the same stratagem to affect two groups with a radically different profile and attitude to combat. For the recruits this was an opportunity to gain experience (*peritus*)¹¹⁷ and overcome their fear – such “blocking” was extremely important, especially for an army, in which a significant portion of fighting men had no actual combat experience. And for the veteran soldiers this was not only a useful training exercise and opportunity to prove their courage/audacity (*audax*), but it also raised their morale, verifying their exceptional status in confrontation with the enemy. The commander’s role was to assess the situation and decide when such an improvised, mixed unit could be deployed. A victorious clash with a small enemy force was beneficial on many levels. First, a combined unit was less likely to flee before engaging the enemy. Experienced troops are more resistant to conformity, so even if some individuals started retreating, a portion of the force would still hold position on the battlefield. Also, we could expect the veterans to be able to stop the novices from running away before it became an issue.¹¹⁸ If the commander carefully selected the enemy force to be attacked, the Romans would have numerical advantage and the element of surprise on their side. These would not diminish the value of victory and would give the Romans more control over the battlefield – an important aspect in a situation where some of the fighters had never been exposed to combat before. Having lived through an engagement in such “controlled” conditions, we can assume that the soldiers became more confident and used to the sight of the enemy. And information about the victory would raise the spirits of the whole army, even those who did not directly participate in the fight. So, the

116 In the event of defeat the results would have been catastrophic for the Roman army. So, the commander had to select the target very carefully, ensuring the tactical advantage beforehand.

117 Wheeler, *Stratagem and the Vocabulary of Military Trickery*, 67–68.

118 This was both due to the internal control mechanisms, as well as the fear of strict provisions of military law. These mechanisms are presented in the part dedicated to military law.

soldiers' fear of death and fear of the enemy would be at least partially blocked, and both new recruits as well as veterans would be more willing to engage the enemy. An army commander planning a pitched battle could then remind his men that they had already beaten these opponents, so have nothing to be afraid of. This method of motivating by referring to past triumphs was often used by Roman generals.¹¹⁹ What Vegetius postulates in the above passage is deliberate mastering of fear through direct confrontation with the enemy. One crucial note is that the target had to be selected carefully to make sure the engagement was not too difficult. We can imagine how damaging it would be for army morale if the pre-selected mixed unit was defeated in the initial clash. So, the officer in charge had to take all possible precautions to prevent that – prepare his soldiers accordingly and choose a weak, unsuspecting enemy force. In the end, the stratagem reinforced the fighting spirit in the army through direct actions, and additionally helped new recruits become accustomed to the feeling of anxiety, and to the enemy.¹²⁰ Interestingly, the 10th century offers an excellent case study of this procedure in the speech given by Constantine VII to his soldiers. The emperor stated that he did not have to be concerned about the soldiers' fighting zeal because they had already defeated their enemy. In a situation like this, people overcome fear and perceive the enemy simply as he is, not as a super-human adversary.¹²¹ In the 10th century, the emperor's actions confirmed Vegetius' reflections on human nature.

The above passage is not the only one in Vegetius's work that speaks of blocking fear and mastering it through exposure to the enemy. Another suggestion was also based on taking direct action; namely, setting ambushes against a poorly-prepared or fatigued enemy. It is worth emphasizing that the author of the treatise deliberately advised attacking an unsuspecting opponent or, as in the first example, targeting smaller and scattered units. This way, Roman commanders minimized the risk of defeat, which could have been catastrophic to an army with questionable morale, leading to a complete loss of combat readiness. Vegetius, once again with great awareness and professionalism,¹²² analyzes the issue in the following manner:

119 See for example: Strat. 7A. 4.

120 Supposedly this was what Gaius Marius did during the invasion of the Cimbri and the Teutones, not allowing his soldiers to engage in combat until they had got used to the appearance and customs of the enemy. Polyaeus, 8. 10. 1.

121 *Military Oration of the Emperor Constantine*, 2.

122 This makes it seem likely that the passage was copied from a separate piece, which did not survive to this day.

It is best if the commander orders a surprise assault on the enemy forces while they are crossing a river, climbing among mountain ravines, or navigating a forest, marshland or wilderness. It is also beneficial to surprise the enemy when they least expect it, when they are unarmed, barefooted, either eating, sleeping or relaxing, away from their mounts; then our own well-prepared men will easily decimate the unsuspecting opponents. Through such engagements our soldiers will become more confident in their skills. It is known that men who had never in their life looked upon the wounded and the dying, or who have not seen injuries and death for a long while, when they are first faced with them, will be terrified and unable to act due to fear, thinking rather about fleeing than fighting.¹²³

The above passage is significant not only to our study on blocking and familiarization of fear; it also enables us to observe elements of the mentality of Roman soldiers that are normally beyond a historian's grasp. Vegetius basically answers the question posed in the introductory chapter to this book regarding revisionism, which in studies of this type are a real nightmare to any scholar. We question whether the psychological profile of a contemporary man can be applied to ancient times, which were (at least in theory) more brutal. Some scholars claim it is impossible, since the attitude towards death was different in the past, as was the attitude towards violence.¹²⁴ Whereas Vegetius says

¹²³ Veg. 3. 10.

¹²⁴ This rule may be true for prehistoric societies, but we cannot apply it to civilized ones. See: Brian R. Ferguson, "Violence and War in Prehistory," in *Troubled Times: Violence and Warfare in the Past*, ed. David W. Frayer and Debra L. Martin (New York, Routledge 2014), 321–356. Some scholars claim that gladiatorial fights and other bloody entertainment events are proof of the brutality of Roman society. Although the violent character of such events cannot be denied, there is still no consensus on their social role and, consequently, their reception by the society. See: a summary of the discussion and some contemporary patterns of behavior: Donald G. Kyle, *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 2001), 7–10. We should also remember that with the coming of Christianity gladiatorial fights went into decline, and society as a whole had less exposure to violence. See: a short recapitulation at the end of the volume devoted to violence in Late Antiquity: Martin Zimmermann, "Violence in Late Antiquity reconsidered," in *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*, ed. Harold A. Drake (London: Routledge, 2006), 351–352, where the author attempts to disprove the notion about the brutality of the past and the belief that violence had less impact on people in Late Antiquity or Middle Ages, than in modern times. The truth is that violence affects humans in a very intense way and was always an important factor to consider, regardless of historical period. For more on the subject of violence, see the excellent work: Heinrich Popitz and Andreas Gottlich, *Phenomena of Power: Authority, Domination, and Violence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 25–52. According to C.M. Gilliver, Romans were deliberately brutal in warfare only when fighting for revenge, during civil strife, or when the enemy refused

something completely opposite, clearly stating that a garrisoned soldier or a recruit needs to get used to the sight of blood and death, which they are simply not accustomed to, due to being out of active field duty – or they will otherwise flee in panic at mere sight of them. So, the author highlighted the emotions and actions applicable to people who found themselves in an extreme situation without preparation. These emotions did not differ from the ones that a contemporary person experiences in similar cases.¹²⁵

Praecepta militaria offers a very interesting approach to accustoming soldiers to the sight of the enemy; it is clearly a combination of ancient thought and the author's pragmatism.¹²⁶ Nikephoros included this advice in a part of his work dedicated to skirmishes with enemies who outnumbered the Romans.¹²⁷ In the author's opinion, when the enemy had a considerable advantage a frontal assault was out of the question. As has been stated before, a Roman *strategos* should avoid direct clashes with the enemy, due to the risk of defeat. According to the author of *Praecepta militaria*, facing a larger invading army damaged the defenders' morale and instilled fear in Roman troops; so naturally, any attempt at a frontal assault would fail. In this situation, the enemy had to be harassed with hit-and-run tactics and ambush attacks, while ultimate victory should be sought in smaller skirmishes and by using various stratagems.¹²⁸ This approach was consistent with the recommendations included in works from Late Antiquity, like in the previously discussed work by Vegetius and *Strategikon*. What was new was the author's subsequent comment; demonstrating a good knowledge of the human psyche, he stated that if the enemy army suffered several smaller defeats in ambushes and hit-and-run attacks, its morale would decline.¹²⁹ On the other hand, Roman victories in these skirmishes boosted morale and therefore dispelled fear of the enemy. The tables would be turned, the enemy would now be terrified of the victorious Romans, as well as exhausted from guerilla attacks, and affected by collapsing morale. Such an enemy ceased to instill fear, the morale of Roman troops was boosted by victories while the enemy's spirits sagged. Nikephoros stated that after three

to surrender. Mercy (*clementia*) was shown to the enemy on a regular basis. Both clemency as well as a brutal show of force were simply tools of war. Catherine Mary Gilliver, "The Roman Army and Morality in War," in *Battle in Antiquity*, ed. Alan B. Lloyd (London: Classical Press of Wales, 1996), 219–238. Here, particularly 234.

- 125 See, e.g. the chapter in J.G. Gray's work devoted to soldiers' reactions to death: Glenn J. Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (London: Bison Books, 1998), 97–130.
- 126 McGeer, "Tradition and reality in the Taktika of Nikephoros Ouranos," 129–140.
- 127 The large number of references to the Christian faith in this fragment is quite telling.
- 128 *Praecepta militaria*, 4. 19. Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, 61. 19.
- 129 According to Nikephoros, at least three smaller victories had to be achieved using hit-and-run tactics to weaken the enemy.

minor victories, a Roman *strategos* could begin to consider a frontal assault, no longer worrying about the numerical superiority of the enemy, whose morale would now be weakened.

The author recommended this war of attrition in practically any situation, especially if the enemy army was of greater or similar strength compared to the Roman army. A fragment of *Praecepta militaria* shows the evolution of Roman warfare by providing advice described in the treatises and presenting a specific tactic deployed against Arab troops in the 10th century.¹³⁰ Romans employed it to successfully repel raids on their territories during the wars with the Hamdanid dynasty. The enemy was allowed to march into Roman lands; meanwhile the local *thémata* troops gathered to prepare for fighting.¹³¹ While the enemy was busy pillaging, hit-and-run tactics were deployed. The border troops tussled with the enemy, making it impossible for the raiders to disperse, at the same time maintaining tactical contact with the rest of Roman forces. As a result, when the combined *thémata* units launched their attack, the enemy troops were exhausted from fighting and their morale was already shaky. Frequently, the Roman *strategoí* would wait for the Arab troops to retreat and then launched the attack. There are many examples of this tactic in chronicles from the 10th century; the best comes from 950 when the soldiers of Leo Phokas attacked Arab troops, who were already returning home, and destroyed them at a pass. A large part of the Hamdanid force was annihilated and Sayf al-Dawla was saved only owing to a simple trick known from Roman treatises – during his flight, he scattered gold and effectively slowed down the pursuit.¹³²

The above-mentioned ideas were also employed by Nikephoros Ouranos, who illustrated how to break through a pass defended by enemy infantry.¹³³ The event in question took place when the Romans, loaded down with spoils of war, were retreating from enemy territory back to the Empire. Enemy infantry took up positions on the passes, so that the Romans would have had to storm them in order to go on. Nikephoros Ouranos recommended setting up camp and waiting for the enemy cavalry following them. Once the enemy cavalry

130 Although *De velitatione bellica* is the best treatise presenting irregular fighting on the Roman-Arab border and hit-and-run tactics, the most complete philosophy of this type of fighting is included in *Praecepta militaria*. McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 228–229. See also an interesting case analysis: Theotokis, *Byzantine Military Tactics* 280–281.

131 Philip Pattenden, “The Byzantine early warning system,” *Byzantion* 53 (1983): 258–299; Haldon, “Information and war,” 380–383.

132 Leo Diaconus, 2. 5; Marius Canard, *Histoire de la dynastie des Hamdanides de Jazira et de Syrie* (Paris: La “Typo-Litho”, 1951), 763–768.

133 The role of the mountain pass in Byzantine warfare was very well described by Marinow, “Mountain warfare in the Byzantine-Bulgarian military struggles,” 95–107.

reached the Roman column, the Romans attacked the mounted troops and all available formations were deployed to ensure that the result of the battle was clearly visible to the enemy troops occupying the passes. After their victory, the Romans cheered, thereby informing the opponents of their cavalry's defeat. It was intended to scare the troops stationed on the passes, destroy their morale and, as a result, force them to retreat without fighting, enabling the Roman army to march through the pass without a costly fight.¹³⁴ This was a clever use of morale to gain a psychological advantage over an enemy enjoying a favorable defensive position.

6 The Ethnographic Context

Often, when threatened, humans resort to simple ways of dispelling fear by stigmatizing the source of the threat. Resorting to stereotypes that make us feel better is nothing new, especially in relation to other cultures and religions.¹³⁵ The mechanism of creating stereotypes has been the same throughout history and the Romans were no exception, especially when describing peoples beyond the *Imperium Romanum*.¹³⁶

The stereotypical image of *Barbaricum* was very deeply rooted in the mentality of Roman intellectuals.¹³⁷ In their recommendations, authors of military treatises sometimes referred to the stereotypical ethnographic image of the opponents of Rome.¹³⁸ While not frequent, these mentions can still be divided into two groups. The first category was the image of the enemy as conveyed by the commander to lower-echelon soldiers. Treatises often reflect

134 Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, 64. 7.

135 Gordon Allport, *The nature of prejudice* (Cambridge: Addison-Wesley, 1954), 107–129.

136 On the image of barbarians in the Roman army in the 6th century in David Alan Parnell, *Justinian's Men: Careers and Relationships of Byzantine Army Officers, 518–610* (London: Palgrave, 2017), 33–76.

137 Erik Jensen, *Barbarians In the Greek and Roman World* (Cambridge: Hackett, 2018), on *Barbaricum*: 216–221, relations with barbarians in Late Antiquity: 245–252.

138 Theotokis, *Byzantine Military Tactics*, 106–122; Georgia Irby, “Climate and Courage,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Identity and the Environment in the Classical and Medieval Worlds*, ed. Rebecca Futo Kennedy and Molly Jones-Lewis (London: Routledge, 2016), 247–265; Doug A. Lee, *Information and Frontiers: Roman Foreign Relations in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 81–105. Especially pages 90–101 where the author takes into consideration environmental factors. Kaldellis *Ethnography after Empire*, 26–43.

simple “us-them” thinking¹³⁹ where the barbarians are presented in a negative way¹⁴⁰ in accordance with a simple mental pattern, which proved effective in channeling aggression and dispelling fear.¹⁴¹ The other category would be the image of barbarians presented to military commanders leading soldiers into battle i.e. the readers of the treatises. The simple “us-them” pattern did not apply to military commanders because the Roman *strategoī* needed accurate information about the enemy troops, their strong and weak points, physical strength and resilience (χρᾶσις) as well as habits, all of which could be used in battle. Therefore, military treatises include two ways of perceiving the opponent and two ways of picturing him. One is very stereotypical and simplified, intended to be used by the commander in his dealings with regular soldiers. The other one is more useful, although to a large extent it is based on a model developed by Hippocrates,¹⁴² targeted at the same commanders who needed practical ethnographic knowledge about the enemy.

The first model, intended for soldiers, focused on contempt for the enemy according to a simple pattern of “us versus them”, “civilization versus *Barbaricum*”, which gave the soldiers a renewed sense of self-confidence and depreciated the enemy’s status. When stimulated, this aversion could be an extremely effective tool, leading to aggression. Interestingly, a reader of military treatises could expect the enemy to be depicted with stereotypical features, known from literature, used with the aim of dispelling the fear of barbarians or motivating soldiers to fight. Sources offer numerous examples of this stereotypical thinking about barbarian warfare coming from Greek and Roman ethnography. Cases in point include the Persians, portrayed as decrepit opponents with weak physiques and a penchant for luxury;¹⁴³ fair-haired barbarians – resistant

139 Contemporary research suggests that violence against outsiders is easier (and psychopathic inclinations have nothing to do with it), especially if that violence is stimulated externally. Myeong Kim et al. “Defense mechanisms and self-reported violence toward strangers,” *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic* 69/4 (2005): 305–312. Very frequently, this is a response to human defense mechanisms. Phebe Cramer, *The development of defense mechanisms: Theory, research, and assessment* (New York: Springer, 1991).

140 An image of barbarians as perceived by Greeks and Romans was presented by Erik Jensen, who showed in a very interesting way the importance of first contact and prejudice on either side. Jensen, *Barbarians*, 1–23. Interestingly, Roman literature includes also an image of barbarians as morally superior to Christians. Gerhart B. Ladner, “On Roman Attitudes toward Barbarians in Late Antiquity,” *Viator* 7 (1976): 24–25.

141 See especially Allport, *The nature of prejudice*, 107–129.

142 In his work *De aeribus aquis locis*, Hippocrates presented the principles of understanding the term “warlike” in a geographic context. See also Massimo Nafissi, “*Freddo, caldo e uomini veri*. L’educazione dei giovani spartani e il *De aeribus aquis locis*,” *Hormos. Ricerche di Storia Antica* 10 (2018): 162–202.

143 Polyaeus, 2. 1. 6; Frontinus, 1. 11. 17; Plutarchos, *Agesialos*, 9.

to cold and good warriors¹⁴⁴ but bereft of tactics and organization, thus easy to defeat by an army exercising tactical discipline; nomads, hungry for spoils and excellent riders¹⁴⁵ but unwilling to fight in open battle. These features were automatically attributed to whole groups.¹⁴⁶ However, there are not many situations in the treatises where the authors recommended presenting the soldiers with detailed features of enemy ethnic groups. Typically, there are only references to the Roman army's former successes in conflicts with a specific enemy, aimed at diminishing that enemy's fighting value, but without going into too much detail. This may simply indicate that the literary *topoi* referring to Rome's enemies, which educated Romans would be familiar with,¹⁴⁷ were not known to regular soldiers. Consequently, employing these literary tropes in order to motivate soldiers would be pointless. This situation was further complicated by the multi-ethnicity of the Roman army, especially in the 6th century.

There is one exception to the way in which commanders painted a stereotypical image of the enemy, typical especially of the Middle Byzantine period and related to the army's piety. In Late Antiquity, no attempts were made to differentiate between Christians and pagans, especially in situations when pagans or heretics were in the service of Rome, for example as part of a *foederati*.¹⁴⁸ The situation started to change in the Middle Byzantine period when the army

144 This picture was presented by both Tacitus and the author of *Strategikon*. Strat. II. 3.

145 See for example Huns: Valerii Nikonorov, "Like a Certain Tornado of Peoples': Warfare of the European Huns in the Light of Graeco-Latin Literary Tradition," *Anabasis Studia Classica et Orientalia* 1 (2010): 264–291 or the Avars. Notably, according to Georgios Kardaras, the influence of the Avar warfare on the Roman army was definitely smaller than it had been. See Kardaras, *Byzantium and the Avars*, 156–176.

146 More on group traits in Allport, *The nature of prejudice*, 189–191.

147 Gerhart B. Ladner presented the image of barbarians in the 4th century and cultural prejudice. See Ladner, "On Roman Attitudes toward Barbarians," 1–26.

148 Hugh Elton, "Military Forces," in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare vol. II: Rome from the late Republic to the late Empire*, ed. Philip Sabin, Hans van Wees and Michael Whitby (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), 281; Timo Stickler, "The Foederati," in *A Companion to the Roman Army*, ed. Paul Erdkamp (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 495–514; Mark Humphries, "International relations," in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare vol. II: Rome from the late Republic to the late Empire*, ed. Philip Sabin, Hans van Wees and Michael Whitby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 261; Peter Heather, "Foedera and Foederati of the Fourth Century," in *Kingdoms of the Empire: The Integration of Barbarians in Late Antiquity*, ed. Walter Pohl (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 495–514; Maria Cesa, "Römisches Heer und barbarische Föderaten: Bemerkungen zur weströmischen Politik in den Jahren 402–412," in *L'armée romaine et les Barbares du III^e au VII^e siècle*, ed. Michel Kazanski and Françoise Vallet (Rouen: Association Française d'Archéologie Mérovingienne and Musée des Antiquités Nationales, 1993), 21–29; Ralf Scharf, *Foederati. Von der völkerrechtlichen Kategorie zur byzantinischen Truppengattung* (Vienna: Holzhausen, 2001).

was definitely more mono-religious. That time marked the beginning of the rhetoric that juxtaposed “us/Christians” with “the enemy/pagans”. When fighting pagans, the commander was responsible for keeping the soldiers’ faith alive by emphasizing that the barbarians do not enjoy divine favor.¹⁴⁹ A soldier was supposed to receive a clear message that would boost morale and aggression: the opponent does not believe in God, which makes him inferior.¹⁵⁰ What is more, since the soldiers are fighting against pagans, it means that God is on the side of the Romans and will support them in battle. The effect was magnified by the entire religious ritual performed by the Roman army before fighting.¹⁵¹

When discussing stereotypes, a question arises whether any attempts were made to instill a sense of superiority in soldiers based on the myth of invincible Rome. Undoubtedly, this myth was widely held, and was present in the work of Vegetius¹⁵² and in the *Tactica*,¹⁵³ even in works written in the 12th century.¹⁵⁴ However, it remains unclear if the myth was used in contacts with soldiers, or if the soldiers’ national pride was being built up by referring to the legend of the state that they were fighting for. Both in *De Rei Militari* and in the *Tactica*, references to the Roman myth form part of the rhetorical introduction. Vegetius mentions the great victories of the past to add credibility to his advice. Leo VI referred to Rome’s military power to show the demise of the state, advocating its revival. In works written by practitioners like *Strategikon* or *De velitatione bellica*, there are no clear references to establishing the myth of the Roman military tradition. Again, as was the case with ethnic stereotypes, it is possible that these references did not bring about the desired effect, as they were meaningless to the soldiers. On the other hand, mentions of the Empire’s great military past were of importance to intellectual circles. This is best evidenced by a fictitious speech delivered by a veteran to the army in 587,¹⁵⁵ after Castus’ division was defeated in battle by the Avars. Responding to a chiliarch

149 *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 12. 57.

150 This model in action in Allport, *The nature of prejudice*, 444–456.

151 Katerina Karapli, *Κατεύδωσις στρατού: Η οργάνωση και η ψυχολογική προετοιμασία του βυζαντινού στρατού πριν από τον πόλεμο (610–1081)* (Athens: Myrmidons, 2010).

152 See especially Veg. 1. 1.

153 *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, pr. 37–55.

154 This type of narration survived until the 12th century. See Leonora Neville, *Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium: The Material for History of Nikephoros Bryennios* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 80–89.

155 The date is not completely certain. The issue of chronology in Theophylact’s work was discussed by academics like John Bury, “The Chronology of Theophylaktos Simokatta,” *The English Historical Review* 3 (1888): 310–315; Naphtali Lewis, “On the Chronology of the emperor Maurice,” *American Journal of Philology* 60 (1939): 414–421; Labuda, “*La Chronologie des guerres de Byzance contre les Avars et les Slaves*,” 167–173.

ordering retreat, the old soldier tried to keep up the fighting zeal among his brothers in arms.¹⁵⁶ Simocatta put the following words in the veteran's mouth:

Do you not see this assembly of Roman people, proud of their zeal, vigorous in arms, experienced both in overcoming adversity and foreseeing what is about to come? Why do you think a minor reverse excludes the possibility of a great success?.... How did the Romans achieve great power and expand their tiny city-state to such great might? In my opinion, it was through their proud spirit, their seething desires, their innate daring and love of danger, their belief that a glorious death is not death.¹⁵⁷

This fictional speech¹⁵⁸ is excellent testimony to the beliefs of a Roman intellectual in the early 7th century. Rome's heroic past was a motivating factor for the defeated and horrified soldiers, a factor that galvanized them into action in the name of the motherland. Unfortunately, this method of motivating soldiers exists only in chronicles, and it seems wholly artificial when juxtaposed with the information included in military treatises.

Despite what a historian might expect, information about the enemies disseminated to the soldiers is not interesting from an ethnographic point of view. What is more, the authors of the treatises advised leaders not to rely on ethnographic stereotypes when dealing with common soldiers. This may be proof that such approach was ineffective. Roman soldiers were expected to receive a simple picture that would stir up hatred for the enemy, a picture that could be successfully used in any situation.

The commanders who were the intended audience of military treatises would be given an entirely different picture of the enemy. In war, knowledge is of key importance, and so the authors of some treatises decided to include ethnographic information about the enemy's habits, strengths and weaknesses,¹⁵⁹ typically following Hippocrates' classical model,¹⁶⁰ or referring to Tacitus when describing the Germanic peoples.¹⁶¹ These authors communicated with the

156 Sym. 2. 13–14.

157 Sym. 2. 14.

158 Anna Kotłowska and Łukasz Różycki. "The Role and Place of Speeches in the Work of Theophylact Simocatta," *Vox Patrum* 36/66 (2016): 357–358.

159 John Haldon emphasized the fact that despite numerous *topoi*, it was useful and practical information. Haldon, "Information and War," 386. Anthony Kaldellis also noted that: Kaldellis, *Ethnography After Antiquity*, 82–88.

160 For information about how the geographic model of the climate and ways of fighting affected narration in ancient times see Nafissi, "*Freddo, caldo e uomini veri*," 162–202.

161 Christopher Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book: Tacitus's Germania from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich* (New York: Norton & Company, 2012), 29–56.

readers/commanders, providing them not only with useful guidelines but also ethnographic *topoi* that have been repeated since Herodotus.¹⁶² This means that the authors of military treatises considered their readers educated enough to follow a cultural code devised over centuries, and to differentiate it from practical knowledge. In the mentioned fragment of Vegetius' work, the first book contains information about the Romans' glorious past and a model list of stereotypical features of ancient military nations: the numerous Gauls, the enormous Germanic peoples, the strong Spaniards, the rich and clever Africans and the cunning Greeks. Vegetius built his model on geography – strong, courageous warriors in the north, rich and clever ones in the south.¹⁶³ The best evidence of the importance of ethnographic descriptions in Roman warfare is the depiction of barbarians included in book XI of *Strategikon*,¹⁶⁴ where the author offered a large number of very practical guidelines about various peoples that the Empire fought against in the 6th century. However, the account was not free from ancient *topoi*,¹⁶⁵ even dating back to Hippocrates' theory.¹⁶⁶ Suffice to say that according to the author of *Strategikon*, the Persians were wicked, dissembling, and servile, but at the same time patriotic and obedient.¹⁶⁷ On the other hand, descriptions of the barbarian military organization had a practical use and were bereft of the literary *topoi*. That was the case in a description of the tribal organization of the Slavs.¹⁶⁸ Information about the Germanic peoples should be interpreted in the same way; according to the writer, they were good soldiers, but due to their mentality could not maintain the correct formation on the battlefield.¹⁶⁹ *Strategikon* contains very practical ethnographic guidelines which could have been of importance during a campaign against the described peoples, mixed with the classical literary *topoi*. The guidelines on fighting with the Empire's neighbors provided by Leo VI, the author of

162 More on the classical Greek ethnography and its sources in Joseph Skinner, *The Invention of Greek Ethnography: From Homer to Herodotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), especially 233–253.

163 Theotokis, *Byzantine Military Tactics*, 106–107.

164 Wiita, *The Ethnika in Byzantine Military Treatises*; Gilbert Dagron, "Modèles de combattants et technologie militaire dans le Stratègikon de Maurice," in *L'Armée romaine et les barbares du III^e au VII^e siècle*, ed. Michel Kazanski and Françoise Vallet (Rouen: Association Française d'Archéologie Mérovingienne and Musée des Antiquités Nationales, 1993), 279–284; Shlosser, "The Slavs In Sixth-Century Byzantine Sources," 75–82; Zástěrová, *Les Avars et les Slaves dans la Tactique de Maurice*.

165 Zástěrová, *Les Avars et les Slaves dans la Tactique de Maurice*, 8.

166 Zástěrová, *Les Avars et les Slaves dans la Tactique de Maurice*, 10–14.

167 Strat. II. 1. 2–3.

168 Strat. II. 4. 51–63.

169 Strat. II. 3. 3–25.

Tactica, should be construed in the same fashion. They were partly taken from *Strategikon* and updated during the reign of the Macedonian dynasty.¹⁷⁰

Despite their application of literary *topoi*, the information given by the authors of military treatises was largely followed by Roman commanders. A case in point could be the campaign of 593 waged against Slavs, who were led by Ardagast. During that conflict, Priscus, a Roman *strategos*, attacked the barbarians exploiting the fact that they built their villages by rivers. To paint a fuller picture, Priscus' troops attacked a Slavic tribe during a funeral ceremony¹⁷¹ when the entire community was feasting and did not expect an attack.¹⁷² This situation shows the utility of ethnographic information about the ways of building villages and about barbarian festivals included in *Strategikon* and other works.¹⁷³ Used appropriately, it could prove surprisingly profitable for Roman commanders.

The ethnographic part of *Strategikon* contains clear indications of the various degrees of aversion to strangers which, according to Stephen Morillo's typology, can be identified as infra-cultural warfare, sub-cultural warfare, and inter-cultural warfare.¹⁷⁴ The attitude expressed towards the Persians, or peoples with fair hair was naturally hostile yet respectful, devoid of insults. During the centuries-long conflict with Persia, far-reaching acculturation was definitely taking place, resulting in mutual respect for the opponent's skills. The author of *Strategikon* apparently held Persians in high regard, even outright praising them.¹⁷⁵ Conflicts with the barbarian world which broke out after the fall of the Western part of the Empire, were simply infra-cultural warfare i.e. conflicts within a single culture. This is probably why the description of fair-haired peoples in *Strategikon* is among the shortest; what Roman commanders needed least was advice on how to fight against the Germanic peoples because they had accumulated that knowledge through century-long acculturation.¹⁷⁶

170 *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 18; Haldon, *A Critical Commentary on the Tactica*, 331–388. In the context of a completely new description of Arabs: Theotokis, *Byzantine Military Tactics*, 109–113.

171 *Strat.* II. 4.

172 *Sym.* 6. 8–9.

173 *Strat.* II. 4. Of course, we do not know whether Priscus followed the guidelines of the author of the treatise or if it was his own intuition.

174 Morillo, "A General Typology of Transcultural Wars," 29–42.

175 *Strat.* II. 1.

176 *Strat.* II. 3. Interestingly, this was consistent with the imperial ideology of power according to which Rome's power would return to all the previously controlled territories. Stouraitis, *Krieg und Frieden*, 331–353. Also of importance was religion, although the author of the treatise did not allude to this aspect.

The treatise's author had an interesting perception of the Slavs¹⁷⁷ who had only recently arrived in the Balkans and were perceived more as farmers, culturally close to Romans.¹⁷⁸ This can be attributed to an association with the nomads ravaging the Balkans. A description of the Avars, a warlike nomadic tribe, is in stark opposition to peoples culturally similar to Romans.¹⁷⁹ The author of the treatise called the Avars superstitious perjurers, motivated by greed. The entire description of the nomads is colored by hatred, fueled by the cultural strangeness and stereotypes. They were a regional power threatening Rome in both military as well as cultural terms, so it was an infra-cultural type of conflict escalating towards sub-cultural warfare, where both sides intend to annihilate the opponent.¹⁸⁰ It is fascinating that Stephen Morillo's typology works for *Strategikon* and it can be very easily applied to the description of the Arabs¹⁸¹ or the increasingly romanized Slavs¹⁸² in the *Tactica*.

At times, military treatises offer basic stereotypes, probably deeply rooted in the collective awareness of Roman intellectuals and military men alike. This category includes information on Persians as skillful archers, resistant to heat;¹⁸³ nomads and their above-average riding skills;¹⁸⁴ or the comfort offered by an Avar tent.¹⁸⁵ Notably, these stereotypes could have an impact on the practical aspects of military life. One example includes the alleged laziness of Armenians, who were thus seen as unsuitable for guard duties.¹⁸⁶ The prejudice of the author of *De velitatione bellica* probably stemmed from the cultural friction between the Armenians and other inhabitants of the Empire.¹⁸⁷

177 Strat. II. 4.

178 Procopius presented Slavs in a similar way. He even acknowledged that their faith was close to monotheism. Procopius Caesarensis, *De Bellis*, 7. 14. See also Aleksandar Loma, "Procopius about the Supreme God of the Slavs (Bella VII 14, 23): Two Critical Remarks," *Zbornik Radova* 41 (2004): 67–70.

179 Strat. II. 2.

180 About the last stage of war in Kardaras, *Byzantium and the Avars*, 82–87.

181 The author even stated that the Arabs were akin to Romans in many ways. *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 18. 114.

182 *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 18. 95.

183 Strat. II. 1.

184 Strat. II. 2. See also: Curta, "Avar Blitzkrieg, Slavic and Bulgar raiders, and Roman special ops," 69–89.

185 Wiita, *The Ethnika in Byzantine Military Treatises*, 370–372.

186 *De velitatione bellica*, 2. 11–15.

187 More on the Armenian presence in the Empire in Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, "Aristocrats, Mercenaries, Clergymen and Refugees: Deliberate and Forced Mobility of Armenians in the Early Medieval Mediterranean (6th to 11th Century a.d.)," in *Migration Histories of the Medieval Afroeurasian Transition Zone*, ed. Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, Lucian Reinfandt, and Yannis Stouraitis (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 327–384. About aversion in Peter Charanis, *The*

To sum up, the approach towards foreign ethnic groups in Roman military treatises was twofold: in the case of regular soldiers, aversion to foreigners had to be stimulated by looking for antagonisms, whether religious or cultural. However, it was done in broad strokes, without indicating any individual national features or referring to *topoi* from classical literature. The situation was quite different in the sections aimed at military commanders. The *stratēgoi* needed the most accurate picture of the enemy, their habits, strengths and weaknesses, ways of fighting and even political organization. This knowledge could be used in the course of fighting, in order to gain an advantage over the opponent. Despite the obvious usefulness of these recommendations for commanders, they were not free from ancient *topoi*, easy to differentiate from practical guidelines. A soldier had to learn to hate his enemy; a Roman commander had to learn about the enemy, get to know them as well as reasonably possible, so as to achieve victory that much easier. This is an indication that despite clearly identifiable transcultural wars waged by the Empire, like the one with the Caliphate and the Avar Khaganate,¹⁸⁸ the military treatises do not place much emphasis on ethnic aspects.

7 Fear of Combat

While preparing for an engagement, Roman commanders knew that soldiers are subjected to acute stress factors, and their mental condition at the time is fragile. A work from the 6th century by the African grammarian Corippus contains what is likely the most interesting description of how fighting men felt the night before an engagement. Supposedly, the exhausted Romans would have nightmares reminding them about the impending clash. A similar phenomenon affected the opposing army of Moors, who in their dreams would strike blows against the Romans only to see them hit their wives' heads (here the passage describes a victorious Roman holding up the severed female head in a gesture of triumph).¹⁸⁹ The poetic description of Corippus clearly demonstrates the fear of unavoidable combat. Soldiers have trouble sleeping and their minds are preoccupied with the phantom of the coming clash. Even garrison-type humor, or attempts to suppress fear by emphasizing the feeling

Armenians in the Byzantine Empire (Lisbon: Livraria Bertrand, 1963), 34; Nina Garsoïan, "The Problem of Armenian Integration into the Byzantine Empire," in *Studies on the Internal Diaspora of the Byzantine Empire*, ed. Hélène Ahrweiler and Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1998), 53–124.

188 Typical of sub-cultural warfare and inter-cultural warfare.

189 Johannis, 2. 452–488.

of community do not bring the expected relief. Combat was simply terrifying, and nothing could change that.¹⁹⁰

The officer in charge was tasked with motivating and supporting his men prior to the clash. Fear of the enemy had a negative impact on Roman troops and had to be suppressed by any means available. It is interesting to note that Roman theoreticians of war were fully aware of how delicate this situation was. This, among other things, was why Romans avoided occupying positions in close proximity to enemy forces, as it could negatively affect the men.¹⁹¹ When faced with an enemy army, the situation changed, and military leaders had to adapt to it. The author of *Strategikon* went as far as to suggest suspending any penalties for crimes committed while awaiting a fight with the enemy.¹⁹² Strict provisions of military law were designed to maintain discipline in times of peace,¹⁹³ but prior to a combat engagement the outcome of enforcing them could be opposite to that intended. Soldiers under extreme stress could decide to revolt, pushed over the edge by the added brutality of their superiors. So instead, Roman unit leaders were instructed to treat their subordinates with more leniency.¹⁹⁴ Thanks to this approach the army commanders did not intensify the stress factors affecting the soldiers and did not introduce new ones.¹⁹⁵ The human psyche, in life-threatening situations, is fragile enough. This attitude of Roman leaders illustrates their belief that in moments leading up to a battle dispensing strict punishments was ill-advised.¹⁹⁶ This is not to say that soldiers guilty of crimes would face no consequences if they survived the clash; after all, penalties were merely suspended, not revoked. This could have worked as an additional motivating factor, although we are unable to verify

190 From a contemporary perspective, this behavior of soldiers and their problems with sleep before fighting could be attributed to PTSD. The Roman soldiers described here in Africa had been fighting a campaign for some time and could have been suffering from psychological fatigue. See Dante Picchioni et al. "Sleep symptoms as a partial mediator between combat stressors and other mental health symptoms in Iraq war veterans," *Military Psychology* 22/3 (2010): 340–355.

191 As evidenced by the fact that they operated in dispersed units, which converged into an army in proximity to the enemy, shortly before a battle. Obviously, another factor that necessitated this approach was that it was then easier to provision the troops. See, e.g.: Strat. 1. 9.

192 Strat. 7A. 6.

193 Veg. 3. 10. Vegetius actually advised enforcing strict provisions of military law during peacetime, in order to maintain discipline in the army.

194 Strat. 7A. 6.

195 For an army preparing for a pitched battle, introducing additional stress factors related to the military law system could have unintended consequences. Penalties were not waived entirely, but dispensing with them allowed soldiers to prepare for combat better.

196 This would affect the morale of both the punished offenders, as well as the onlookers.

that with the sources at our disposal; but it is possible that if a soldier distinguished himself in battle, any punishment that he faced could be reduced or abolished completely. Extenuating circumstances did exist in military law, at least in the provisions described by the author of *Strategikon*.¹⁹⁷

The situation was similar with transgressions committed by many soldiers at once (as for example, participating in a suppressed mutiny). If a battle was impending, the commander would do well not to punish the whole group, as this could lead to unintended consequences, perhaps even another revolt. Instead, it was advisable to penalize only selected instigators.¹⁹⁸ This way, all soldiers would be reminded of the inevitability of punishment, without actually suffering it. So, on the one hand, it disciplined the troops, and on the other hand – educated them.

As has already been mentioned, merely the sight of the opposing army could bring about feelings of anxiety before a battle. Other fragments of this book describe stratagems intended to evoke fear in enemy ranks by the very appearance of the Roman army. But we need to bear in mind that Roman soldiers struggled with the same feelings of terror. The most difficult situation was when the enemy unmistakably outnumbered your own forces. When dealing with a numerically superior and well-equipped opposing army, the Roman commander would obviously attempt to choose the most suitable terrain for the engagement.¹⁹⁹ The usual solution would have been to occupy a hill, which gave the men holding it an advantage in the coming battle. However, it also exposed them to the sight of the enemy force for longer. This could make the soldiers lose their fighting spirit even before the clash, scared by the overwhelming numbers of the enemy.²⁰⁰ In such cases, the author of *Strategikon* proposed a very simple ruse to maintain troop morale. The Roman army was to occupy positions at the foot of the hill, on which the battle would take place. Once the enemy had got closer to Roman lines, the army would re-position to the high ground. This did not give Roman troops too much time to observe the opposing force. So, the enemy's possible numerical superiority did not

197 Extenuating factors could especially be applicable in the event of fleeing the battlefield or losing the unit standard. If a soldier was wounded during combat, he was not held responsible for breaking formation (the penalty for which was death); however, one thing to note is that these wounds had to be sustained while fighting, not while running away. See more: Strat. 1. 8. 17; 1. 8. 18.

198 Strat. 8A. 2.

199 See a short piece: Łukasz Różycki, "How to choose the best field of battle – according to the authors of Roman military treatises," in *War in History The History of Polish and General Military Science*, ed. Andrzej Niewiński (Lublin: Napoleon v, 2017), 23–39.

200 A similar situation was highlighted by the author of *Strategikon*. Strat. 7B. 7.

negatively impact the morale of the defenders. The situation seemed more difficult if there were no elevated positions nearby, and the battle was to be fought on open ground. Then, Roman generals could not conceal their own men before the eyes of the enemy, nor vice versa, so they had to rely on other tricks in order to neutralize the negative effect of being outnumbered by the opposing army.²⁰¹ In such cases, what aided the Romans were gossip and limitations of human eyesight. The commander was to spread a rumor among the men that the oncoming army was mostly made up of baggage trains and spare horses, not actual soldiers.²⁰² Viewed from a distance, any army moving to engage the Romans would have seemed like an incoherent mass; it would be extremely difficult to notice any details,²⁰³ especially if the enemy kicked up a dust cloud that could completely conceal the approaching force. This is why it would be easy for the Roman soldiers to believe that what they were seeing was not an overwhelming enemy army, but rather a force with many wagons and spare, rider-less horses. When the enemy closed the distance,²⁰⁴ the lie told by the commander did not matter all that much anymore, since the troops were already preparing for combat with a positive attitude, trusting in their fighting skill and unfazed by the opponents' numerical superiority.

In order to mentally prepare the army for battle, a commander could use any means available to improve morale and diminish the quality of the opponents in the eyes of his men. The simplest method of invoking audacity (θάρσος)²⁰⁵ among the men was informing them about the successes that the Roman army had already had against the same enemy in other battles. This way, the soldiers became more self-confident, expecting an easy victory. Even an outright lie by the commanding officer was acceptable in such situation – the victorious battle, which the *strategos* referred to, need not have happened.²⁰⁶ This is how

201 Outnumbering the enemy was not a guarantee of success – a case in point could be Iphicrates, who despite having numerical superiority always first looked to the morale of his men. Polyaeus, 3. 9. 8.

202 Strat. 7A. 8.

203 Howard Whitehouse, *Battle in Africa 1879–1914* (Camberley: Fieldbooks, 1987), 35. states, by quoting *Artillerist Manual*, that 900 meters is the minimum distance at which you can distinguish between individual soldiers, and 1,190 meters is where you can differentiate between infantry and cavalry.

204 Which is roughly 640 meters. Whitehouse, *Battle in Africa 1879–1914*, 35.

205 Practically always with positive connotations (the only exception is the stubborn fly in Homer's work: μύτις θάρσος ἐνὶ στῆθεσσιν ἐνήκεν). *Iliad*, 17. 570.

206 It did not even need to have been victorious. Leotychidas II, even before receiving information about the outcome of a battle that his allies were fighting, had already spread news of their victory among his men. Frontinus, 1. 11. 7.

the author of *Strategikon* suggested motivating soldiers by disseminating news (ἄγγελμα),²⁰⁷ which did not necessarily have to be true:

You need to reinforce the courage of your soldiers by spreading information about the victories that our armies achieved on other fronts.²⁰⁸

Not every trooper or *archon*²⁰⁹ reacted positively to such ruses being used for improving morale; in the face of the enemy a portion of the army would still practically lose all combat effectiveness. The authors of treatises from Antiquity somewhat resignedly admitted that in every army there will be cowards, whose participation in combat may be more detrimental than beneficial. These men, who either mentally or physically did not meet the requirements of the Roman army, were usually sent to the back lines, to serve with the wagon train or look after spare horses.²¹⁰ Interestingly enough, we have a source that confirms such practices took place. In 586, *strategos* Comentiolus divided his forces before a battle against the Avars into four detachments, in which there were 6,000²¹¹ able-bodied men, but an additional 4,000²¹² soldiers were deemed unfit for combat and sent away to the baggage train.²¹³ Theophylact Simocatta, the chronicler who wrote down this piece of information, clearly emphasized that the *strategos* dismissed soldiers who were of no use in battle. In the 10th century, in his speech to the *stratego*i of the East, emperor Constantine VII stressed the fact that commanders should be selected for their bravery; they would choose more courageous soldiers, rejecting cowards.²¹⁴ By dismissing commanders not eager to fight, the emperor intended to strengthen the entire army.

Military treatises demonstrate how to, as the saying goes, separate the wheat from the chaff in this regard. To root out cowards, troops were to be told

207 In my opinion the author of *Strategikon* meant all types of news, both true, as well as rumors and even lies told by the *strategos*. Dennis, who translated ἄγγελμα as “fabricated report,” distorts the original meaning. See *Maurice’s Strategikon*, 80.

208 Strat. 8A. 12.

209 In this book the term “*archon*” is employed to refer to low-ranking military commanders (below *magister militum*), who were often given individual command, in order to avoid the constant use of modern military nomenclature.

210 Strat. 12B. 9. 8–10.

211 Sym. 2. 10. 8–9.

212 According to Theophanes the number of men unfit for combat was not 4,000 but 40,000! This is completely improbable and should be considered a misspelling (Theophanes Confessor, AM 6079).

213 Sym. 2. 10. 8–10.

214 *Address of the Emperor Constantine VII to the Strategoi of the East*, 2.

that those who were feeling ill would not accompany the army into battle but would be sent to the back lines.²¹⁵ As a result, most of the cowardly soldiers, who wished to distance themselves from danger, reported being sick, or that their mount was too weak. Meanwhile, if an officer was overcome by fear, the author of *Strategikon* explains that this would be indicated by their skin paling in the face of the enemy and by them being indecisive.²¹⁶ Such men were considered incompetent and not fit to lead others into combat, so the author of the treatise suggested assigning them to reinforcement units before the battle, where they could do as little harm as possible.

This was, obviously, simply a preventive measure before a battle which did nothing to effectively solve the issue of cowardice in combat. Additionally, it could make the whole army lose its combat effectiveness if a significant portion of soldiers reported that they themselves or their mounts were indisposed.

Fear of engaging the enemy was suppressed by various means; one method was to familiarize the soldiers with the battlefield beforehand. According to the author of *Strategikon*, men became more confident by knowing in advance which obstacles to avoid (δυσχερεῖς),²¹⁷ which translated directly into zeal and fighting spirit:

Regardless of what location the commander chooses, it is crucial that he familiarizes his men with it. As a result, in battle they will know which difficulties to avoid and will therefore fight with more confidence.²¹⁸

Another interesting passage worth mentioning here is by Vegetius, who suggested to do the following before a battle:

215 Strat. 7A. 29. This stratagem was advised only in the event of staging an ambush or launching a surprise assault. Even cowards would still have to participate in a pitched battle; with the only concession being that they might be deployed to guard the wagon train.

216 Strat. 8A. 24.

217 Most people translating this passage suggest that the author meant obstacles in the terrain (see, e.g. G.T. Dennis *rough spots* – Dennis, *Maurice's Strategikon*, 90), which soldiers had to navigate around. For the purposes of this analysis, the meaning of the term δυσχερῆς has been expanded and is translated as general difficulties, see e.g.: τὰ δυσχερῆ (difficulties) – *Demosthenis Orationes*, 60. 24; or, with a slightly different meaning δυσχερῆς ποιέσθαι – Thucydides, *Historiae*, 4. 85. In the context of *Strategikon* this approach expands the meaning of the whole sentence to include any unsuspected situation that might occur on a field of battle, both in relation to the lay of the land, as well as possible ambush spots.

218 Strat. 8B. 89.

You should always strive to deploy your troops before the enemy does. First of all, you will not be disturbed then and will be able to position your ranks as you see fit; secondly, your men will feel more secure and the enemy – less confident. It is a well-known fact that with two opposing forces the one that does not hesitate to attack seems stronger. Your adversaries will fear you once they see a well-ordered army deployed against them. But the greatest advantage is that your force, prepared and equipped beforehand, may make a surprise attack against the enemy, who is hastily attempting to form into ranks. You are halfway towards victory if you manage to disrupt the enemy's peace of mind even before the battle has begun.²¹⁹

The Latin author offered a solution that, in effect, would block fear in Roman soldiers. The army that deployed first was in a better state psychologically – it gave soldiers a feeling of security, confidence (*confido*), and eroded the courage of the enemy force. What is more, the Romans were not exposed for a long time to the sight of already-formed enemy ranks, which was mentally exhausting and compounded anxiety. Instead, they could observe how the enemy commander struggled to quickly set up his troops in formation. This surely inspired confidence. Soldiers would then be willing to put their trust in their commanding officer and would, at least partially, block out their fear of the enemy. On the other side, the opposing general was forced to react to the situation on the battlefield, lost the initiative, and his men had to form into ranks in the face of a combat-ready Roman army, which must have been disheartening – as Vegetius puts it, *aduersariis fiduciam minuis*. Such a situation also provided tactical opportunities. The Romans could assault the unprepared enemy and achieve an easy victory. The last sentence in that passage is yet further confirmation that, on the battlefields of Antiquity, it was crucial to make proper use of stratagems and exploit any opportunity to disrupt the enemy's plans.

8 Fear of the Unknown

Waging war beyond the borders of one's country, meaning offensive operations on enemy territory²²⁰ or against unknown enemies, are an additional stress factor that affects the behavior, morale and motivation of soldiers and needs to

²¹⁹ Veg. 3. 18.

²²⁰ This remains an important factor in modern times. The issue was touched upon by, e.g.: Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 242–245 – even factoring in climate differences!

be approached carefully by commanding officers. The unknown, just like the dark, always evokes an almost irrational fear in humans,²²¹ which is why it will be the subject of this next section.

Roman soldiers frequently had to adapt to new situations based on the enemy's actions. This often happened in the Balkans,²²² where apart from the Goths, Gepids, Avars, Slavs,²²³ or in later periods Bulgars, Serbs, the Rus' and the Pechenegs, there were innumerable lesser tribes of people searching for a better life or rich spoils. Fear of fighting would in such circumstances be intensified by rumors of an unknown enemy, obviously exaggerated. This could easily lead to mass hysteria; the mechanisms for how it occurs are well-researched, thanks to the available analyses of conformity in group situations.²²⁴ Roman commanders were well aware of this threat, since it could lead to defeat on the battlefield even before the engagement began. Terror was a powerful adversary, so the army needed a way to deal with it. The author of *Strategikon* suggested simple methods:

If you find yourself in a state of war with a powerful enemy whose fighting methods are unfamiliar to yourself and your army, then the soldiers, not knowing what to expect, will become anxious; it is then that you must act carefully and avoid open battle. Before the clash, the principal and safest thing to do is select several experienced and lightly-equipped men and dispatch them to attack your opponent's forces. If they manage to kill or capture a few of the enemy, all soldiers will become convinced of our superiority. They will overcome their fear, morale will improve, and they will get used to fighting this new adversary.²²⁵

By following the above suggestion, in reality only a handful of Roman soldiers gained experience in fighting the unfamiliar opponent, but that was not

221 Chaudhury et al. "Quantification of stressful life events in service personnel," 213–218. Service on foreign soil was awarded 75 points by Indian soldiers and ranked fifth among possible stress factors.

222 See the works: Turlej, "Upadek granicy cesarstwa na Dunaju," 185–246; Maligoudis, *Σλάβοι στη Μεσαιωνική Ελλάδα*; Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*; Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and his Historian Theophylact Simocatta*. A summary of Roman warcraft in the period was compiled by: Syvanne, *The Age of Hippotaxotai*.

223 See a study of the issue in: Zástěrová, *Les Avars et les Slaves*.

224 In the literature on the subject authors even use the term "contagion of fear" when referring to a mob, in which individual awareness is dulled. Pieter, *Strach i odwaga*, 112–113; Charles Kiesler and Sara Kiesler, *Conformity* (Boston: Wesley, 1969); Allport, *The nature of prejudice*, 63–65.

225 Strat. 7A. 11.

the commander's intention.²²⁶ The return of such a victorious unit directly affected the morale of the whole army; in effect, all soldiers suppressed their fears (being afraid – *δειλιάω*). This method exploited the mechanism of dissemination of information in groups.²²⁷ News of any victorious skirmish would quickly spread around the whole army, which up to that point was dominated by fear of the unknown. This anxiety was blocked thanks to the victory achieved and information gathered by the selected detachment. The author of *Strategikon*, due to the lack of a suitable phrase, referred to this blocking with the term “getting used to” (*ἐθίζω*).²²⁸ As a result, the majority of the army, without any risk whatsoever, learned firsthand knowledge about the enemy, their fighting methods, and even what they looked like. All this information was directly linked to Roman victory over this enemy, which in the minds of the soldiers meant that although the opponents seem exotic, they could be beaten, and their unfamiliar qualities should not be feared. The success of the Roman detachment would obviously be exaggerated by the soldiers passing on this information, which further reduced the fear of the unknown, blocking this stress factor.

This is an excellent example of understanding the mechanisms of experiencing fear, which confirms that the Romans had a wealth of practical knowledge in the field that we today know as social psychology. One of the methods of overcoming anxiety was, essentially, to fight fire with fire. Contemporary psychology talks about taming fear or achieving courage by adapting to dangerous situations.²²⁹ Here, we should once again point out that the author of *Strategikon* used a very similar term (*ἐθίζω* – adapting) to describe the expected reaction of soldiers. The mechanisms that govern fear of the unknown are deeply rooted in our psyche, and when humans experience this kind of anxiety, reducing the level of stress is extremely difficult. What affected most soldiers in

226 As opposed to familiarizing the whole army with the sight of the enemy without taking any offensive actions, where the goal was to improve the morale of every soldier.

227 See the excellent German studies on the subject from the point of view of social psychology: Klaus Thiele-Dohrmann, *Unter dem Siegel der Verschwiegenheit. Zur Psychologie des Klatsches* (Düsseldorf: Claassen, 1975); Jörg R. Bergmann, *Klatsch: Zur Sozialform der diskreten Indiskretion* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1987); Gordon Allport and Leo Postman, *The psychology of rumor* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1947). And more polemically, Ralph L. Rosnow, “Psychology of rumor reconsidered” *Psychological Bulletin* 87/3 (1980): 578–591.

228 See e.g.: *M. Antonius Imperator Ad Se Ipsum*, 10. 22. Or on “getting used to”: Hippocrates, *De articulis*, 41.

229 The basics in: Julia Yang and Alan Milliren. *The Psychology of Courage An Adlerian Handbook for Healthy Social Living* (New York-London: Routledge, 2010), 3–16. More in: McGurk, Castro, “Courage in Combat,” 169–173.

the situation described above was fear of an unknown threat which disrupted the normal process of mental and physiological mobilization. In group situations the feeling was compounded²³⁰ by the spreading of false or exaggerated information about the enemy. We should also bear in mind that before battle this was merely one of a whole array of stress factors that affected both the whole group as well as individuals. Any given soldier would additionally be afraid of the battle itself, of death, of how he would be perceived by his comrades and commanding officers. The commander was expected to eliminate or alleviate the effects of as many stress factors as possible before fighting started, which would ensure victory in the coming clash. The more confident a soldier was, the more prepared, motivated and convinced of his skills, the higher his chances were of actually winning the battle. This is why the authors of military manuals recommended that soldiers be familiarized with the unknown. The mechanism of adapting to fear can in short be defined by the words of Józef Pieter: *In order to get accustomed to danger men must first overcome their fears many times in a conscious way.*²³¹

The fact that Roman commanders of Antiquity employed methods based on the rule quoted above confirms that they were very conscious leaders – not only aware of the problem but able to actually use the mechanisms of how fear came to be in order to fight its effects. Fear of the unknown enemy had to be neutralized in a deliberate, gradual fashion, by adapting your subordinates to the new opponent. The *strategos* at the head of the army was to select a group of experienced soldiers and employ guerilla tactics. During these skirmishes, soldiers quickly adjusted to enemy fighting methods, overcoming their personal fears. But, in this situation the anxieties of the actual participants of the clash were not the priority, especially since these would be small, carefully selected detachments. But once the skirmishing party returned to the camp, having defeated a previously unknown enemy,²³² news about the victory would quickly spread among all other soldiers. This, in turn, led to the removal of blocks that paralyzed individuals or groups.²³³

230 See: James M. Dabbs and Howard Leventhal. "Effects of varying the recommendations in a fear-arousing communication," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 4 (1966): 525–531.

231 Pieter, *Strach i odwaga*, 182.

232 This is why it was crucial to form such units out of the best and most experienced soldiers, who would guarantee success. In the event of defeat the consequences would have been catastrophic for the morale of the whole army.

233 One common fear response is for the object of fear to become so powerful that it paralyzes and limits the awareness of the person experiencing it. Breaking down these blockades in the stream of consciousness allows the individual to regain control and start reacting to danger.

There were also other methods of familiarizing your troops with the enemy and neutralizing the fear of the unknown. The issue was approached differently by Vegetius, who in his work advised commanders of Roman armies to simply remain in close proximity to the enemy:²³⁴

It is entirely human and natural that prior to a battle soldiers experience fear. Even the sight of the opponent seen face to face terrifies those less resilient. But there is a solution to alleviate this anxiety; you simply need to previously adapt the troops to the sight of the enemy by having them occupy secure positions from which they can spot and observe the opposing force and in this manner get used to the enemy presence before the battle. Let them even take the opportunity to scatter and dispatch enemy groups, let them notice their customs and learn about their weapons and mounts. Once they are familiar with the sight of their adversaries, they will cease to be afraid of them.²³⁵

In this way, Roman soldiers could get used to what the enemy forces looked like and get used to the thought of fighting them. The remedy for fear was the sight of the opposing force and the opportunity to skirmish with them, which partially blocked feelings of anxiety before the main battle. This was a secure and direct method of taming the soldiers' fears, while at the same time avoiding open confrontation with the enemy (which could lead to disastrous results if even a small Roman unit had been defeated). The solution offered by Vegetius led to a direct blocking of fear for the whole army, instead of indirect blocking, as in the methods described in *Strategikon*. It was supposed to familiarize the troops with the sight of the enemy, their customs (*mos*), equipment (*arma*), and even mounts (*equus*), and overcome the fear that these objects evoked. This advice could be followed when fighting against unfamiliar tribes, as well as those already well-known to the Romans,²³⁶ although it seems to be more applicable in the former case. Regardless, the method described by Vegetius also allowed soldiers to tame their fears by employing very similar mechanisms.

With regard to familiarizing soldiers with the enemy through skirmishes, the author of *De Re Militari* suggested a slightly different approach. In the

²³⁴ Vegetius also advised engaging smaller enemy forces that were easier to defeat, while at the same time getting soldiers used to the sight of blood and the hardships of warfare. Veg. 3. 9; 3. 10.

²³⁵ Veg. 3. 12.

²³⁶ In such cases soldiers would also need time to get used to the sight of the enemy and to understand their behavior, especially if the army consisted of inexperienced recruits.

case of a small-scale engagement, the whole Roman army was to participate. This way, instead of blocking fear thanks to rumors spread by a pre-selected detachment, Vegetius suggested that the whole army be directly involved. In theory, this would be more effective than what was proposed in *Strategikon* (fear would be blocked by directly engaging every soldier), but in practice, any such small-scale clash could easily evolve into a full-on pitched battle. What is more, if the Romans followed Vegetius's advice and were then bested in a skirmish in which all the legionnaires participated, it could destroy the morale of the whole army, leading to total defeat.

The issue of blocking out the fear of the unknown has been touched upon both in the work of Vegetius and in *Strategikon*. Although the authors of the two works approached it differently, the solutions they proposed were based on the same method: fear was to be consciously overcome by soldiers through confrontation with the enemy. Vegetius suggested doing it in a controlled manner but using a significantly greater force; the author of *Strategikon* advocated a more aggressive approach, using a small detachment. Both solutions theoretically affected the human psyche in similar ways and would be effective for an army that had not previously encountered a given enemy.

9 Fear of Equipment

One of the frequently underestimated aspects in the theatre of war is the issue of the “costumes” worn by its actors.²³⁷ Even the ancient Greeks understood how the proper look can impact opposing armies. A hoplite's armor was supposed to protect its wearer, but equally important was the message sent by the exquisite equipment. A warrior was showing off his wealth, since the arms and armor were his property, but he was also attempting to intimidate the enemy.²³⁸ Shields were polished to a reflective surface,²³⁹ with painted images of terrifying figures, or eyes to ward off danger. Chest pieces were made of bronze, formed into the shape of imposing muscles to make the opponents cower before the hoplite's physical strength, and the head was protected under a helmet adorned with a horsehair crest. The importance of this final piece of equipment is clearly illustrated in Homer's description of Hector setting off to

²³⁷ Studies on this subject, for an earlier period and based on narrative sources, were conducted by: Gilliver, “Display in Roman Warfare,” 1–21.

²³⁸ van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 53.

²³⁹ Supposedly this was what Spartan warriors did. See: Xenophon, *De republica Lacedaemoniorum*, II. 3.

fight. When the son of the Trojan hero saw his father in full gear, complete with the crested helmet, he recoiled in his cradle, terrified, and began weeping.²⁴⁰

The Romans were equally well aware of how the appearance of soldiers could change the course of a battle, by affecting the morale of both fighting sides.²⁴¹ Icons on the shields of Roman legionnaires made it easier to recognize your own soldiers, but also allowed the soldiers to identify with their unit. As a case in point, *Notitia Dignitatum*²⁴² includes a whole catalogue of shield adornments associated with specific formations that facilitated identification of units in combat. This strengthened the feeling of unit cohesion and could have a disheartening effect on enemy forces. However, there were also situations where visually identifying a unit resulted in something completely opposite to the intended effect. In one instance, the Alemanni purportedly recognized markings on shields as belonging to a Roman unit that had fled before them in the past, avoiding combat;²⁴³ obviously, it would be difficult to fear an enemy that you had already triumphed over in previous encounters. But the fact remains that the symbols painted on Roman shields were an important factor in establishing the feeling of belonging to a unit and the feeling of pride, both personal and communal.

The primary purpose of military equipment was to provide protection to soldiers and make them feel safe. The quality of Roman equipment can be assessed, among other things, by what happened to a cohort of *Legio VI*, garrisoned in one of the forts that were attacked during the civil war with Pompeius. Despite the fact that the enemy loosed about 30,000 arrows²⁴⁴ in the direction of Caesar's troops, the garrison did not suffer many fatalities (although apparently every soldier had been wounded, and four centurions

240 Iliad. 6. 467–70.

241 It is worth pointing out that the Romans most likely did not have the notion of parade arms and armor. It was the same for Late Antiquity and Middle Ages in the Roman East. Even the most decorative armor pieces had to have actual combat effectiveness and be usable in battle. See for example the richly decorated cavalry helmet from Berkasovo (type Berkasovo 1). Mahand Vogt, *Spangenhelme. Baldenheim und verwandte Typen* (Regensburg: Romisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, 2007). Roman treatises outright ridicule commanders (and even emperors) who appeared bathed in gold on the field of battle, equipped with clearly decorative and completely useless weaponry. An emperor was to have good-quality iron armor that would protect him from enemy blows, and a sword, with which he would be able to strike back effectively. *Byzantini liber De Re Militari*, 16. (referring back to ancient treatises!)

242 Even if it is sometimes inaccurate. Robert Grigg, "Inconsistency and lassitude: the shield emblems of the *Notitia Dignitatum*," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 73 (1983): 132–142.

243 Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 16. 12. 6.

244 Apparently, Caesar's own soldiers counted the number of arrows. See: *Commentarii rerum gestarum belli civilis*, 3. 53.

had lost an eye).²⁴⁵ As proof of the quality of Roman arms and armor, and the personal courage of the defenders, Caesar was presented with the shield of the centurion Sceva, which had as many as 120 holes punched in it by enemy projectiles. But commanders had to look for balance between how well the equipment performed,²⁴⁶ and how heavy it was. If a soldier was carrying too much weight, or was wearing gear of poor quality, it would impact not only the level of protection afforded by his equipment, but also the soldier's feeling of security and, in turn, morale. The results could be disastrous.²⁴⁷

Armor, shields, swords and spears²⁴⁸ were to be more than just functional, robust and well-maintained. Roman arms and armor had yet another, less obvious, purpose – they were part of psychological warfare.²⁴⁹ The fact that soldiers looked good could improve army morale and simultaneously evoke fear in the hearts of its opponents. However, there were limits to military fashion; at some point the usefulness of military gear gave way to flamboyance. An anonymous writer from the 10th century warned the readers against overly ornamented gear and too sophisticated tent equipment. The author stated clearly that the armor and gear, as well as the horse-gear, should be made of good iron without unnecessary gold and silver elements, putting forward the ancient Romans and Greeks as positive examples.²⁵⁰

Curiously, soldiers were not actually most afraid of the most effective weapons, but rather weapons they felt powerless against.²⁵¹ One passage that does a good job of capturing this attitude is the opinion²⁵² of bowmen expressed

245 A.D. Lee uses this fragment of Caesar's work to accurately point out the Roman helmet's deficiency in protecting the wearer's face against projectile weapons. Lee, "Morale and the Roman Experience of Battle," 200.

246 Here we should also mention another important factor – how expensive armor was to manufacture. This was particularly important during the imperial period, when all expenses related to army equipment were borne by the state.

247 These correlations are pointed out, e.g. in: Lee, "Morale and the Roman Experience of Battle," 200.

248 One piece that illustrates how little we know about ancient warfare is *A Storm of Spears Understanding the Greek Hoplite at War* (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2012), by Christopher Matthew, in which the author, using experimental archaeology and historical sources, showed that our understanding of fighting in a phalanx formation should be re-evaluated. See also: Victor Davis Hanson, *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (New York: University of California Press, 1989).

249 This aspect is normally disregarded in academic studies of Roman equipment, which tend to focus on typology and determining the practical value of items. See, for example, one of the most frequently quoted (and most fascinating!) catalogues of Roman arms and armor: Simon James, *Excavations at Dura-Europos 1928–1937 Final Report VV The Arms and Armour and other Military Equipment* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2004).

250 *Byzantini liber De Re Militari*, 16.

251 Holmes, *Acts of War*, 209–211.

252 Iliad, II. 380–395.

by Diomedes, whose leg had been punctured by Paris's arrow. The wounded Greek called Paris an honorless womanizer who lacks the true courage to stand face to face with his enemy. Close combat was seen as the truly manly form of combat, whereas the bow evoked feelings of fear and helplessness in those attacked by the projectile weapon. The same emotions must have accompanied barbarians caught under fire from Roman engines of war or archers, whose importance in Late Antiquity had grown noticeably compared to previous periods. To have an inkling of Roman capabilities in missile warfare, let us consider that in the Middle Byzantine period Nikephoros Ouranos stated that an army should have 150–200,000 arrows in store, regularly delivered to the archers during fighting.²⁵³ As was mentioned before, the principal issue in war was the effectiveness of the fighting force, and the commander was first and foremost tasked with ensuring that his men suffer as few casualties as possible. In this grand game, everything was fair.

The authors of the military treatises of Antiquity were well aware that military equipment could be used to manipulate one's forces. This is why it was one of the duties of the *strategos* in charge to care for the maintenance and the appearance of his subordinates' equipment, as expressed in this quote by Vegetius:

On the other hand, a soldier in clean attire, with a well-maintained and polished weapon, trained and disciplined – he indeed brings honor to a mindful and diligent tribune!²⁵⁴

A very similar attitude was expressed by the author of *Strategikon*, who imposed penalties under provisions of military law on any commanders whose soldiers did not maintain their equipment properly. To sum up, a Roman soldier was responsible for maintaining his arms and armor; he was bound to do so by military law and army discipline. Adherence to the law was ensured by the soldier's superior officer, who would also face legal consequences if any men under his command were found negligent in their duties. This whole system of proper maintenance standards was related to the quality of equipment, which often made the difference between the soldier living or dying on the battlefield. So, military gear had to be kept in the best possible condition. On the other hand, caring about the appearance of arms and armor was directly related to aspects of psychological warfare. All this is confirmed by Vegetius in the part of his treatise devoted to the duties of a decurion:

253 Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, 56. 14.

254 Veg. 2. 12.

As was already stated, a centurion should be a man of great physical strength, tall, proficient in fighting with a sword and using a shield, and deeply knowledgeable about warcraft. He needs to be vigilant, reasonable and quick-witted, able to follow orders swiftly and without discussion. He must maintain discipline and ensure that his men engage in combat training. Furthermore, he should make certain that soldiers under his command wear proper clothes and boots, so that they do not suffer from cold, and that all weaponry is kept shining clean. The same is expected of a decurion, who commands a *turma* of cavalry. He must first and foremost have a lean and dexterous physique to be able to lightly and gracefully mount his steed while in armor and full gear. He must be an excellent rider, master spearman and accurate bowman. Moreover, a decurion must teach the soldiers of his *turma* everything there is to know about fighting from horseback, and have them show proper care to their weapons, and frequently clean their protective gear, armor, spears and helmets. It is known that the sheen of polished armor terrifies the enemy greatly. And who would believe that a soldier is a worthy fighter when their dirty and rust-caked weaponry proves otherwise? A decurion must know how to lead people as well as horses, and he will not achieve these qualities without persistence and laborious effort.²⁵⁵

So, it was the decurion's job to care not only about the training of his men and the state of their equipment, but also ensure the best possible look of their weaponry, which was supposed to "shine" (*fulgeo*).²⁵⁶ Vegetius stated that the enemies were afraid of the weapons' "sheen" (*splendor*). This method of evaluating an army's quality by its appearance should come as no surprise. For example, Ammianus mentions a situation where a surprised unit of Roman cavalry realized that the Persians had appeared on the battlefield by noticing their equipment glinting.²⁵⁷ The better a force presented itself, the more terrifying it would seem to any opponents preparing to attack. The quality of equipment, and its appearance, were to be a testament to the army's fighting prowess and willingness to engage in combat. Vegetius also said that if soldiers did not have their equipment polished, and if there was visible rust (*robigo*)²⁵⁸ on their weapons, they would be unable to frighten the enemy. In short, a

255 Veg. 2. 14.

256 Veg. 2. 12.

257 Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 18. 8. 4.

258 See, for example, this poetic passage: *nam hoc quidem pole robigine, non est e ferro factum*, Plautus, *Rudens*, 5. 2. 13.

soldier's gear and its appearance were to confirm the quality and professionalism of the wearer and, consequently, inspire fear among enemy ranks. The author of *Praecepta militaria* adopted a very similar attitude: in the case of a marching square²⁵⁹ he advised extending the front by redeploying the additional heavy infantrymen and archers from the rear to the front of the formation.²⁶⁰ The archers were also expected to have spears, *menavlia*, javelins and shields to give the impression that the army was bigger. Notably, better-equipped soldiers were supposed to be placed in the front of the formation. As a result of this simple trick, enforced by the tactical situation, Roman commanders could extend the front of the formation and gain an optical advantage, instilling fear in enemy troops.

A different stratagem was suggested by the author of *Strategikon*, which nevertheless both verifies the ideas presented by Vegetius, and relies on achieving the same effect – terrifying the enemy.²⁶¹ The author of the treatise stated that in the eyes of most people the army that had the shiniest equipment was expected to emerge victorious. So, Vegetius was right in saying that the appearance of the army is of great importance on the battlefield and that a properly prepared battle line can terrify the enemy. However, according to the author of *Strategikon*, success was dependent on the grace of God and the skills of the commander, not simply the appearance of the army. Yet, by employing knowledge about how an army's strength was perceived based on its appearance, the author suggested a simple ruse to exploit this mechanism. The Roman commander was to hide his soldiers from enemy eyes and keep them hidden until the last moment, so that the enemy could not adapt to the Roman formation or assess the perceived strength of the army by observing its polished equipment. This would give the advantage to the Romans in the first stage of the clash, when they would spring their ambush, not allowing the enemy to visually identify the threat posed by their army. If there was no forest or dip in the terrain nearby, where soldiers could hide, the author of the treatise suggested that they remove their helmets,²⁶² cover their armor with shields and cloaks, and even obscure spear points so that they would not reflect the

259 More on these tactics in Eric McGeer, "The Syntaxis armatorum quadrata: a tenth-century tactical blueprint," *Revue des études byzantines* 50 (1992): 219–229; Theotokis, *Byzantine Military Tactics*, 192–194; Georgios Theotokis, "The square fighting march of the Crusaders at the battle of Ascalon (1099)," *Journal of Medieval Military History* 11 (2013): 57–72.

260 *Praecepta militaria*, 2. 14. In a situation when an army had a large cavalry force that could not be contained within an infantry formation.

261 Strat. 7B. 15.

262 This would only be possible if soldiers had been trained to quickly take off and put on their helmets. When not worn, helmets were to be held in hand.

sunlight. Once the opposing force got closer, the Romans were to uncover their equipment and make themselves ready for the inevitable clash. This sudden sight of a resplendent line of troops was to confuse the opponents, who did not expect the Romans to be so well equipped. In effect, according to the author of the treatise, the battle could be won before the first blows were struck, since the enemy, disheartened and terrified by the surprising revelation, lost all confidence. By hiding their true strength, the Romans allowed the opposing force to feel superior, as no pieces of Roman armor were visible. The author of *Strategikon* clearly emphasized that all people perceive troops in polished armor to be more powerful than those in dull equipment that does not reflect sunlight. Using this fact, Romans built up the perception that they were the inferior force, but dropped this pretense once the armies neared each other. In this situation, the deliberately enhanced confidence was replaced with fear, which might lead to panic. Enemy soldiers would be affected by many stress factors, like any army charging into combat, and would suddenly realize that the determination that allowed them to advance was based on a false belief about the Roman army being poorly equipped. Right before the actual clash, the Romans revealed their real equipment, completely changing how they were perceived, which in reality was the basis of the enemy soldiers' self-confidence. Introducing this additional stressor, i.e. the sight of a well-equipped line of Roman troops in shining armor could leave the enemy shaken.²⁶³ Battle was now inevitable, both lines were advancing on each other, but now the Romans gained the upper hand by surprising their opponents and crushing their spirit at the last moment. Some more notes on this subject can be found in the first book of *Strategikon*:

The better a soldier looks in his gear, the more confident he becomes and seems more terrifying to the enemy ranks.²⁶⁴

We can imagine the sight of the Roman army in full gear (in the following quote expressed as *ὄπλισις*, meaning all equipment, both offensive and defensive),²⁶⁵ with their swords drawn and spears lowered. Soldiers in this formation must

263 See, for example, on resistance to extreme stress and its limits: Dante Cicchetti, "Resilience under conditions of extreme stress: a multilevel perspective," *World Psychiatry* 9/3 (2010): 145–154.

264 "Ὅσον γὰρ εὐσχημος ἐν τῇ ὄπλισιι ὁ στρατιώτης ἐστίν τοσοῦτον καὶ αὐτῶν προθυμία προσγίνε-
ται καὶ τοῖς ἐχθροῖς δειλία. Strat. 1. 2.

265 The author uses a classical word that denotes precisely the equipment used in warfare. See, e.g.: (*ὄπλισις ἀνδρῶν*) Aristophanes, *Ranae*, 1036; (*εὐσταλεῖς τῇ ὄ.*) Thucydides, *Historiae*, 3. 22.

have felt confident, ready for action and invigorated (it is no coincidence that the author used the term *προθυμία*, which with some liberty could be translated as “morale”). Seeing these lined-up, disciplined and well-equipped troops would surely evoke fearful respect in the enemy ranks. The author’s choice of a specific word (*τοσοῦτος*)²⁶⁶ was to emphasize the importance of the quality of equipment.²⁶⁷ This was another instance where the Romans went out of their way to highlight aspects of their warcraft that distinguished them from neighboring peoples. The mere sight of a Roman army line was to make the enemy react with outright cowardice (*δειλός*)²⁶⁸ after noticing the discipline, the quality of equipment and the superior military training of a professional fighting force; this was at a time when barbarian armies attempted to emphasize the qualities and skills of individual warriors.²⁶⁹

The author of *Strategikon* put the sentence quoted above immediately after an in-depth description of Roman cavalry equipment in the 6th century. One important thing to note is that he highlighted the significance of decorative elements, both for mounts as well as men. Horses were to be equipped with quality-looking, terrifying armor,²⁷⁰ but also had to look presentable, which is why their harnesses would have small pennants or other decorations hanging from them.²⁷¹ This was also true for the equipment of soldiers, who wore comfortable, good-looking coats²⁷² over their mail, slept in spacious, Avar-type tents and adorned their armor with small pennants.²⁷³ The author of *Strategikon* went so far in his attempts to improve the appearance of the Roman army as to suggest decorative elements that would be a hindrance in actual combat but would look good on the march. A case in point could be the pennants hung from long cavalry spears (*κοντός*). From the treatise we learn that they served no practical purpose, and moreover during combat they would interfere with a soldier’s use of the spear, and also hinder bowmen standing in further ranks from attacking effectively at range.²⁷⁴ Nonetheless, the author of *Strategikon* advised that these pennants be used, claiming that *kontoï* adorned in such

266 Compare, for reference, when used to describe a person: *καὶ σε τοσοῦτον ἔθνηκα θεοῖς ἐπιείκελ’ Ἀχιλλεῦ*, *Iliad*, 9. 485.

267 See used with a similar meaning: *Odysea*, 14. 99; *Iliad*, 9. 485.

268 The term *δειλός* refers to a cowardly person, often in a military context, which clearly shows what effect the author was going for. See, e.g. words used by Achilles: *Iliad*, 1. 293.

269 See more on this subject in the chapter devoted to war cries.

270 *Strat.* 1. 2.

271 *Strat.* 1. 2.

272 *Strat.* 12B. 1. 8.

273 *Strat.* 1. 2.

274 *Strat.* 2. 10. Arrows could accidentally hit the pennants blowing in the wind; besides, the archers’ field of vision was greatly reduced.

manner were magnificent to behold, inspiring fear and awe.²⁷⁵ However, before combat soldiers were supposed to take these decorations down, so as to engage the enemy with battle-ready equipment. There was an obvious impracticality to this approach. A horseman would have to stop, possibly dismount, take the pennant down and put it in his saddlebag. There was also an inherent risk – doing this took up time, which could be used by the enemy; additionally, if a Roman cavalry unit was ambushed it would have to fight with the pennants still attached to the spears. Despite all this, the author of *Strategikon* insisted that the spears be decorated. The appearance of the army was of paramount importance. It was a powerful factor that gave Romans two major advantages. On the one hand, it improved the morale of the legionnaires; and on the other hand – it terrified and paralyzed the enemy. The author of the treatise devoted much attention to the appearance of the whole army and of individual soldiers, according to his belief that the better a soldier looks, the better he will fight and the more terrifying will seem to his opponent.²⁷⁶

Fully aware of the non-combat significance of their equipment, Romans made efforts to enhance the terrifying effect it had on their opponents. Vegetius makes the following note in his description of the Roman army of the past:

All *antesignani* and *signiferi* marched on foot, wearing lighter protection and helmets adorned with bearskin, to frighten the enemy ranks. Whereas centurions wore armor, shields and iron helmets with a perpendicular silvered crest, so that soldiers could spot them easier.²⁷⁷

Soldiers responsible for carrying the unit's symbols had to be courageous and trustworthy in the eyes of the commander;²⁷⁸ they were hand-picked from the best men in a given unit. The bearskin that was draped over the equipment was to instill and intensify a feeling of not simply fear – but outright *terror*²⁷⁹ in the enemy. The sight of a skin of a powerful and frightening animal worn as a cape could cause a subconscious chain of associations – if the soldier carrying the unit's symbol or marching at the head of the formation²⁸⁰ is clad in animal skin, he must be more powerful than the animal that had to be killed and

275 Strat. 2. 10.

276 Strat. 1. 2.

277 Veg. 2. 16.

278 Strat. 1. 5.

279 See, e.g.: *tantusque terror incidit eius exercitu*, *De Bello Civili*, 3. 13. 2.

280 Vegetius wrote both about the standard bearers and the *antesignani*, who led the initial assault, that they were among the best soldiers in the army, and their sight was supposed to terrify the enemy from the very beginning of the engagement.

skinned to make his garment. Seeing such a trophy draped over armor evoked a primal fear of wild nature, and fear of the person who had dispatched the beast and taken its strength. So, it was an attempt to frighten the enemy based on magical thinking,²⁸¹ which is not reserved only for primitive cultures. This fear could be an unconscious reaction, but we should remember that, when dealing with specific cultures, this was a deliberate choice, exploiting the belief that a fighter assimilates the strength of a defeated animal/opponent.²⁸² In such cases it would be an intentional stratagem used by the Romans to intimidate enemies through magical thinking.²⁸³ It is also possible that soldiers felt better about themselves when wearing the powerful animal's skin and seeing the frightening and awe-inspiring effect it had. According to the theory of magical thinking, it might have even been the case that the *signifer*²⁸⁴ believed in being granted the power of the bear and the unit's standard.²⁸⁵ It is difficult to speculate, and even more difficult to prove, if this was intended or not. The *signifer* draped in bearskin was to intimidate through the sheer power associated with an actual bear, thus emphasizing his own strength and the power of the standard borne into battle, which in turn was a conduit for the strength of the entire unit. So, there were two aspects to this intimidation attempt – on the basic level the opponents were to be terrified by the standard bearer but, by association, also by the unit's standard and, since the standard was the unit's symbol, the whole unit. In the end, it was a complex play on the emotions of enemy soldiers and one's own men.

There was one other stratagem related to unit standards that was also used to sow fear among enemy ranks. In the Roman military system each unit had

281 For more about magical thinking, see: Leonard Zusne and Warren H. Jones, *Anomalous Psychology: A Study of Magical Thinking* (New York: Psychology Press, 1989), 1–32. especially two first chapters. Categories of magical thinking in modern times were described in: Thomas Grüter, *Magisches Denken: Wie es entsteht und wie es uns beeinflusst* (Frankfurt am Main: Scherz, 2010), 31.

282 Similar beliefs are present in, for example, various forms of shamanism: Michael Ripinsky-Naxon, *The Nature of Shamanism: Substance and Function of a Religious Metaphor* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), 23–33. This attitude was also characteristic of the Celts, see for reference: Miranda Green, *Animals in Celtic Life and Myth* (London: Routledge, 1992), 44–65; 196–238.

283 It is worth noting that the *signum* itself also referred to the ideas of magical thinking, namely the belief that objects or symbols have actual power. Grüter, *Magisches Denken*, 31.

284 In Roman times the *signifer* was the term for a standard bearer of the legions. He carried a *signum* (standard) for a cohort or century.

285 This is obviously only a theory, which we are unable to prove in any way, although similar beliefs are to this day present among army men and during various military conflicts. See, for example, on magical thinking and terror in times of war: Eugene Subbotsky, "The Belief in Magic in the Age of Science," *SAGE Open* 2014/4 (2014): 12.

its own standard, which had great tactical significance.²⁸⁶ Every unit using a specific standard would have a set number of soldiers in it,²⁸⁷ so by observing a Roman army the enemy could roughly estimate its size, even at a large distance, simply by counting the number of standards. The authors of Antiquity suggested that this fact be used to Roman advantage. Since the enemy spies or scouts assessed the army's size by counting standards, each Roman unit was supposed to have two of these, with both being displayed on the march.²⁸⁸ In this way enemy scouting parties reported about the Roman army being twice its actual size. Information about a large Roman force must have caused fear in enemy ranks and would demoralize them before the battle. However, having two standards also introduced inherent disadvantages, mainly the confusion they might cause for Roman troops during battle. Soldiers oriented their position in combat and – consequently – their tasks, in relation to the unit standard; having two such symbols might be very problematic, which is why the author of *Strategikon* advised that the second standard be taken down before the engagement.²⁸⁹

As already mentioned, the standard²⁹⁰ played a huge part in building a feeling of camaraderie among soldiers and strengthening unit cohesion.²⁹¹ Legionnaires identified themselves strongly with a unit's symbols, often choosing to risk their own lives in defense of the standard.²⁹² Establishing unit cohesion was a crucial aspect of motivating soldiers to fight. Romans were well aware of the power of symbols and the possibilities they offered, and made very deliberate use of these. This is evident in the images placed on the banners. In the pagan period it was animalistic and mythical imagery, referring directly to animal totems reflecting the religious beliefs of an agricultural

286 George T. Dennis, "Byzantine battle flags," *Byzantinische Forschungen* 8 (1982): 51–59.

287 Although it needs to be said here that Romans in the VI century did not operate under a system in which each unit was expected to have the same number of soldiers. Actually, such a solution would offer a disadvantage, since enemies would be able to accurately assess the strength of the Roman army by counting the number of standards. *Strat.* 2. 20.

288 *Strat.* 2. 20.

289 *Strat.* 2. 20.

290 More on banners and insignia used in the Empire in Andrea Babuin, "Standards and insignia of Byzantium," *Byzantion* 71 (2001): 5–59.

291 According to A.D. Lee, it was the critical component among all other factors that built unit cohesion. Lee, "Morale and the Roman Experience of Battle," 208–209.

292 However, examples of such actions are not described in sources from Late Antiquity. But, e.g. during a clash with the Eburi, a signifier supposedly rescued a legion's standard by throwing it into the camp over the rampart, losing his life in the process. See: *Bellum Gallicum*, 5. 37. 5. About the standard guards themselves in Roman times, see Oliver Stoll, "Die Fahnenwache in der Römischen Armee," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 108 (1995): 107–118.

society.²⁹³ In Late Antiquity, they used religious symbols related to Christian faith. The actions of Constantine the Great, who before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge had his soldiers paint Christ-related images on their shields, was only one example of the changing trends. In the Christian period, Romans stopped using such imagery as the golden eagle (*aquila*) or the bust of the emperor (*imago*); the only things that stood the test of time were the *phlamoulon* (φλάμουλον), i.e. a pennant on a spear and the significantly larger *bandon* (βάνδον), which was the main military banner. Notably, religious symbols also included sacred paintings, for example an icon depicting Christ used before the Battle of Solachon in 586.²⁹⁴ In both periods, these depictions were symbolic in character, closely related to prevalent beliefs of the time, which only served to strengthen the role of the standard and the soldiers' attachment to it. The way that barbarians and Persians treated captured banners is yet another proof of their significance to the Romans. The best example from the period in question comes from the work of Procopius and his description of the Roman siege of Nisibis. According to this account, the Persians sent out a sortie against Peter's forces, which they defeated and routed, taking their standard. A swift counter-action by the main force under the command of Belisarius forced the Persians to retreat, but Peter's defeat remained a fact. Returning to the besieged city, despite having suffered many casualties in the second stage of the clash, the Persians used the captured symbols to raise their spirits and discourage their enemies. The very next day, the banner captured from Peter's men was hung from one of the towers, adorned with sausages,²⁹⁵ which was definitely meant to convey the message that the defenders lacked neither courage, nor supplies. It was an excellent way to improve the spirits of the besieged army, while at the same time striking directly at the morale of the Romans, who were reminded of their loss each time they saw the standard. The significance of banners is corroborated by the fact that following the victory at Martyropolis in 587,²⁹⁶ Aristobulus, in command of the Roman troops, sent the emperor the Persian military banners as evidence of his great success.²⁹⁷

Vegetius, in a previously-quoted passage, also points the reader's attention to the attire of centurions, who were supposed to have crested iron helmets, which made it easier for soldiers to see them. The sight of their superior officer

293 A good summary of how the Roman army treated religion in pre-Christian times can be found in: Shean, *Soldiering for God*, 31–70.

294 Sym. 2. 3. 4–5. Most likely the icon of Camuliana. See more in: Ernst von Dobschütz, *Christusbilder: Untersuchungen zur christlichen Legende*, Leipzig: Hinrich, 1899, 51–52.

295 Procopius Caesarensis, *De Bellis*, 2. 18. 26.

296 Evagrius Scholasticus, 6. 9.

297 Sym. 3. 4.

in combat was obviously an encouraging one during battle; it improved morale and motivated soldiers to fight on. Syrianus Magister also saw the non-combat advantages of certain less-than-practical elements of Roman equipment, including helmets and shields:

The shields of the first soldiers in a line should be sturdy, with an iron umbo, and a spike in the middle, at least four fingers long; its sight should frighten the enemy from afar, and hurt them at close distance.²⁹⁸

And further, in a similar tone:

Helmets should have a spike at the top, at least three fingers long; it makes our soldiers seem more frightening to the enemy, and may be useful as a weapon in actual combat.²⁹⁹

It is worth noting that the passages quoted above are taken from a very practical³⁰⁰ chapter devoted to armament. This means that psychological aspects of Roman equipment were something natural to Roman commanders and were used deliberately. An army was to look presentable, and its sight should make the enemy want to flee (φοβέω).³⁰¹ Looking at a long line of armored³⁰² troopers was supposed to impress their opponents, and this feeling was deliberately compounded by the Romans thanks to specific details of their equipment. In the case in question, Syrianus talked about the benefits of spiked shields and helmets, designed that way to terrorize even at a distance. Once again, we see how a soldier was made to feel more confident in his gear; and the enemy, on the other hand, was to be frightened by the sight.

While a well-equipped soldier was to feel comfortable in his gear and command the enemy's respect, field artillery could tip the scales on the battlefield. As has been stated before, soldiers are most afraid of battlefield factors which they cannot control. Nothing affects soldiers' morale and psyche more than

298 Syrianus, 16. 10–13.

299 Syrianus, 16, 27–30.

300 It contains information about the length of spears, the need to wear padding under the armor, and many other details often omitted in other military treatises.

301 Force to retreat, compare: *κραιπνὰ μάλ' ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα διωκέμεν ἢ δὲ φέβεισθαι*. *Iliad*, 5. 223, but also terrify: *σίγησον, ὦ τάλαινα, μὴ φίλους φόβει*. Aeschylus, *Septem contra Thebas*, 262 or: Herodotus, *Historiae*, 7. 235.

302 Even if not all soldiers in the army wore armor, the first lines in the formation had to be equipped with it. This made the enemies think that they would be dealing with a whole army of armored troops. Syrianus, 16.

coming under fire from archers or war machines.³⁰³ A case in point – the retreat of the Pechenegs besieging a Roman march camp in 1050. The nomads' morale sagged when their commander was shot by a Roman bolt thrower, killing both the man and his horse.³⁰⁴ Seeing this, the nomads apparently lost their fighting spirit and soon retreated when Roman reinforcements arrived. Numerous military treatises contain information about war machines and their use.³⁰⁵ However, the most interesting information, in the context of battlefield psychology, comes from *Praecepta militaria*.³⁰⁶ The author provided a list of weapons that could determine the result of a battle in the case of a stalemate. These include a small *cheiromangana* (χειρομάγκανα), three *elakatia* (ἑλακᾶτια)³⁰⁷ and Greek fire with a delivery system, probably a *cheirosiphōn*.³⁰⁸ The author specifically highlighted the use of Greek fire with a smaller version of a trebuchet as something that, used at the right moment, could break the enemy's spirit and force him to retreat.³⁰⁹ Interestingly, these devices were not intended to provide supporting fire but to crush the enemy's resistance in the right place on the fighting line.³¹⁰ The author of the treatise was well aware of this. We can only imagine how the opponent's morale was affected by the

303 Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army*, 183–190. See also works on shell shock, bearing in mind that contemporary artillery is much more traumatizing than a hail of arrows or other projectiles. Nevertheless, contemporary works on trauma offer a glimpse into the emotions of soldiers caught under fire which they cannot return. Norman Fenton, *Shell Shock and its Aftermath* (London: Mosby, 1926); Tracey Loughran, *Shell-Shock and Medical Culture in First World War Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 79–115; Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

304 Skylitzes, 470–471.

305 Vegetius dedicated a large part of book IV to ballistic devices. The author of *Strategikon* was more brief in his descriptions, but also emphasized the importance of small, easy to transport devices on the battlefield. In *Strategikon*, on ballistic devices Strat. 10. 1; On small ballistae mounted on wagons and used on the battlefield Strat. 12B. 6. 8–9. About their effectiveness, see Eric Marsden, *Greek and Roman Artillery: Historical Development* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 86–98, 164–8. See also Titus Flavius Josephus' description of a projectile decapitating a soldier and landing three stadions away (i.e. more than 1.5 km): *Bellum Iudaicum*, 3. 245–7.

306 *Praecepta militaria*, 1. 15. Similar approach in Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, 56. 15.

307 See also: Strat. 12B. 6. 8–9; *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 5. 7; 6. 27; 15. 27. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, 133–135.

308 On the other hand, it was not named in *Praecepta militaria*. More about Greek fire in John Haldon, “‘Greek fire’ revisited: current and recent research,” in *Byzantine Style, Religion and Civilization In Honour of Sir Steven Runciman*, ed. Elizabeth Jeffreys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 290–325; *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 19. 6.

309 See especially Theotokis, *Byzantine Military Tactics*, 203–206.

310 This was rightly noted by Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*, 368–369.

use of liquid fire, very difficult to extinguish during fighting. Even if only a few enemy soldiers were directly exposed to it, the effect of fear of fire and the horror of the affected men sparked the collective imagination, created general panic³¹¹ and, in the end, led to retreat. Roman artillery could be damaging to the enemy's morale, especially when the opponents could not retaliate in any way.

The examples from the sources quoted above clearly illustrate that Roman authors of military treatises knew about the non-combat significance of equipment. Armor was primarily used to protect the body, but also had to impress the enemy, just like the drawn swords glinting in the sun, or the polished spear shafts and helmets, while the war machines bombarding from a distance were intended to damage both enemy soldiers and their morale. The army was to terrorize potential opponents by sight alone, which was deliberately intensified by elements that were practically only theatrical props. Spikes or crests on helmets made soldiers seem taller; spiked shields deterred the enemy from approaching the formation and moving into close combat. The Roman soldier in full gear was to feel invincible. Good quality armor and weapons built a soldier's trust in his gear and at least partially neutralized fear of the enemy, because how could anyone fear barbarians in rags,³¹² when equipped with the cutting-edge technology of the time? The authors of Antiquity were correct in claiming that the better a soldier feels in his gear, the better he will fight. What is more, the author of *Strategikon* took this idea of affecting the enemy's psychology with merely the appearance of the army to the next level, by suggesting using commonly known mechanisms to lower or break enemy morale. If the troops had confidence in their gear, the quality of Roman equipment should be hidden before the enemy and revealed mere moments before the inevitable clash. This way, the Romans crushed the opponents' belief in their own strength (based on the idea that Roman troops possessed inferior arms and armor), and additionally – they terrified the enemy, displaying their well-made and well-maintained equipment, which had been kept concealed up to that point. The examples listed above illustrate the intentionality of the Roman actions, which means that psychological warfare based on the appearance of the army was commonplace in the studied period.

311 Such was the case with a decurion from Pompeius's cavalry during a siege of Leptis. An accurately fired projectile killed the man, pinning him to his horse, after which his soldiers fled in horror. *Bellum Africum*, 29.

312 See, as an example, the description of Slavs in the work of Procopius, whose material culture was presented in the worst possible light. Procopius Caesarensis, *De Bellis*, 7. 14.

10 Fear of Service in Difficult Conditions

One of the factors that significantly increase stress is service in remote locations threatened with enemy attack,³¹³ especially if these were also elevated positions.³¹⁴ A surprisingly large portion of Syrianus Magister's work was devoted to this subject; the author describes in detail the problems and challenges faced by legionnaires stationed in endangered positions. This usually meant garrisons located along the limes, or crews of elevated observation points. It was the duty of these soldiers to protect the local population and notify the commander of the main Roman force about any coming threat. This was done by using smoke signals or lighting fires that were to inform successive observation units about the arrival of an enemy.³¹⁵ As far as it was feasible, soldiers stationed in remote posts were also tasked with evacuating the locals³¹⁶ to nearby strongholds or *refugia*³¹⁷ and attempting to halt the advance of the enemy force.³¹⁸ It was a demanding and difficult posting which, we can assume,

313 See also the contemporary classification of this stress factor: Chaudhury, et al. "Quantification of stressful life events in service personnel," 213–218; Chaudhury, et al. "A Life Events Scale for Armed Forces personnel," 165–176.

314 A system of watchtowers and shelter strongholds supported Roman fortifications on the borders; this was particularly popular in the Middle Byzantine period. See Haldon, "Information and war," 380–383.

315 Syrianus, 6. 3–5. See also: Marcus Rautman, *Daily Life in the Byzantine Empire* (London: Greenwood, 2006), 212 and, for a later period: Pattenden, "The Byzantine early warning system," 258–299.

316 Syrianus, 5. 7–10; 6. 6–10.

317 Syrianus, 6. 6–10. We should bear in mind that the Empire maintained a system of *refugia* (secure, fortified locations without a permanent military presence) for rural populations, and that there were also fortified villas, which served a similar purpose during enemy raids. See: Ramsay MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1967), 149. The role played by these structures was also briefly described in: Ralph Mathisen, *Roman Aristocrats in Barbarian Gaul Strategies for Survival in an Age of Transition* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993). Such situations were not unusual even for city dwellers, who also had to seek shelter behind city walls in the event of enemy attack. Many ancient cities were only partially fortified, and most of the civilian population lived outside the city walls. See, e.g. Eugippius, *Vita sancti Severini*, 4. 1; 22. 4 and in the literature of the subject: Hugh Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe AD 350–425* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 168–171.

318 Provided that the strength of both forces was roughly equal. If the opposing army decisively outnumbered the Romans, stratagems were employed. The defenders could pretend to prepare for a clash, and then retreat without a fight, which mentally exhausted the enemy and delayed them until the main Roman force arrived; another feasible tactic was to use deserters to sow misinformation among enemy ranks. Syrianus, 6.

quickly took a toll on the soldiers' mental health. Although we should bear in mind that there was often an additional motivating factor for the Romans, i.e. the safety of their families. Maintaining combat readiness for extended periods under life-threatening conditions surely left its mark on whole garrisons, decreasing their effectiveness over time. Syrianus Magister had this to say on the subject:

Soldiers who are given the task of scouting, or are garrisoned in remote locations, should be inherently intelligent, courageous, clever, vigilant, healthy and strong. They should have children and wives waiting for them at home, and more possessions than regular soldiers. They are to sleep primarily during the day, not at night, and never all at once, some earlier, some later. Whenever they successfully report the presence of enemy forces, they must be rewarded, especially if this occurs during the rainy season. Their positions should be picked so as to allow for a good view of the surrounding area.³¹⁹

The qualities listed in the above passage need no further comment. Soldiers on threatened borders had to be able to independently assess the situation and make snap decisions in the face of the enemy. Belisarius used to give scouting duties to members of his personal retinue, that is the soldiers whom he trusted the most.³²⁰ Similar qualities were expected from commanders of remote posts; with one caveat added by the author that they should also be devout believers in God.³²¹ Syrianus introduced an additional requirement; in his opinion such soldiers should have families³²² (preferably wives and children) in Roman territory, and he goes even further in a different passage, explaining that no members of their families could live on the other side of the border.³²³ Obviously, any such complicated familial relations would affect a soldier's loyalty and whether or not he fulfilled his duties with diligence. So this was a way to additionally motivate the troops. In a life-threatening situation, in the

319 Syrianus, 7. 4–12.

320 See, for example, the scouting party led by Diogenes after taking Carthage. Procopius Caesarensis, *De Bellis*, 3. 23.

321 Syrianus, 9. 23–25. It is possible that the note about being a man of devout faith was related to the heresies that emerged in Late Antiquity.

322 Notably, the same piece of advice can be found in Onasander's work, referring to the *strategoí*. According to this military author, a good commander should have a family. Small children were believed to strengthen the man's loyalty to his country, and adult ones were his successors and supporters. See more: Onasander, 1. 12–13.

323 On the subject of those manning forts and their desired qualities, see: Syrianus, 9. 21–34.

proximity of enemy forces, such motivated legionnaires were more likely to risk galloping³²⁴ to Roman army positions,³²⁵ knowing full well that their actions could ensure the safety of their family, and that completing the assigned task would lead to additional reward from the commander. Although in the studied period it was not unusual for families of soldiers to live in garrison strongholds, in the case of advance posts Syrianus advised against such arrangements, particularly for fortified positions threatened by the enemy.³²⁶ The families of the legionnaires should be housed deep within the province,³²⁷ which guaranteed the soldiers' loyalty and, in turn, the security of the post.³²⁸ Apparently, there was also a real peril of bribery of border troops, since Syrianus emphasized that they should be wealthier than most other soldiers. This approach to corruption was typical of Antiquity; it was believed that a wealthy man, who has more to lose, would be less susceptible to bribery.³²⁹ The stress of serving in an advance post must have been tremendous; the responsibility of the task, combined with the possible loss of life and the fact that soldiers remained in combat-ready state for extended periods, must have quickly worn down the garrison units in mental terms. This is why Syrianus advocated frequent rotation of garrisons in advance border strongholds.³³⁰ It allowed the soldiers to recover after their difficult posting, and the commanders could rest assured that the units responsible for scouting and gathering intelligence about the movements of enemy troops were well-rested.

The information presented above illustrates that, on the one hand, Roman commanders did manipulate the soldiers posted in remote locations, at the very least by controlling the housing arrangements of their families. But on the other hand, which is immensely important and intriguing, the upper

324 Soldiers stationed in these border strongpoints had to have sufficiently fast and tough horses to be able to fulfill their assigned tasks. Syrianus, 7. 20–23.

325 Obviously, the attackers would attempt to intercept such a messenger by any means at their disposal.

326 If the fortified position was strong and difficult to capture, and could store a sufficient amount of food to last for a prolonged siege, Syrianus allowed the families to join the soldiers inside. Syrianus, 9. 21–34.

327 This is the only part of the work where the author could mention the stress factor related to marital infidelity, which ranks very highly in modern times. But Syrianus does not do that, which may indicate that in Antiquity this was not seen as a serious issue, or perhaps commanders considered it to be the private matters of soldiers, which the army should not interfere with. Chaudhury, et al. "Quantification of stressful life events in service personnel," 213–218.

328 Syrianus, 9. 21–34.

329 Aeneas Tacticus, 5.

330 Syrianus, 9. 27–29.

echelons were aware of the mental pressures that soldiers had to endure in small border garrisons. There was a system of incentives and rewards in place, to encourage diligent execution of duties. Also, soldiers were not expected to serve for long periods in advance posts. It was the job of their commanding officer to rotate the men frequently enough to prevent them from becoming mentally exhausted.

Weaponizing Fear

It is imperative to consider, attempt and undertake everything in advance, before that critical moment comes to pass. It is the mark of a great leader that they always first strive to destroy or at least dishearten the enemy – possibly without any losses – by launching raids from a concealed position, rather than seeking an open battle, where both sides are subject to the same threats.¹



Fear can be more dangerous on the battlefield than the actual opponent you're facing, but if used correctly it can also become a powerful ally.² As Stephen Morillo stated, cowardice could have been expected on either side of the conflict. A good commander could make use of this fact in order to spread panic in enemy troops.³ This part of the book will be devoted to stratagems employed by Roman leaders to gain advantage over the enemy through fear. The chapter is divided into sections which will describe specific ruses related to selected groups of people (scouts, deserters, diplomats, etc.). A portion of analyzed sources will also deal with methods of blocking fear, which is why the selection of material is certainly not comprehensive, and in certain cases may seem controversial. Instilling and suppressing fear are related fields, and often methods of blocking the feeling were simultaneously used to cause terror and panic in the opposing force. A good example would be pieces of Roman military equipment, designed to dishearten the enemies, while at the same time improving the morale of the wearer. This is why this chapter will include both methods of causing fear and weakening morale. The choice of which ruse to cover in

¹ Veg. 3. 9.

² Obviously, there are examples of using simple methods designed to terrorize the enemy and beat down all resistance. One such method was for the Romans to sack captured cities or launch preventive attacks on *Barbaricum*. On the subject of pacification expeditions of the Roman army in *Barbaricum*, see.: Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe*, 234–264.

³ Morillo, “Expecting Cowardice: Medieval Battle Tactics Reconsidered,” 69–71.

which chapter was the author's personal preference, based on whether a given trick would primarily affect the enemy, or one's own men.⁴

As could be expected, the main bulk of the theatre of war, this peculiar bloodless game between the two opposing sides, happened before the actual battle. And battles themselves would usually be resolved before the soldiers had even engaged with the enemy. It was an ability that all great commanders possessed, to prepare soldiers in such a way as to block their fears, while at the same time make the enemy afraid of them.

1 Prisoners of War

In the event of direct confrontation with the enemy, it was imperative to secure any available advantage beforehand.⁵ The main factor in improving the morale of your men and weakening that of the enemy was often the treatment of prisoners. An enemy soldier captured before the clash would not only provide valuable information⁶ about the strength of the opposing force and its mental condition, but if used correctly could also become part of psychological warfare. This worked both ways; for example the barbarian scout captured by the armies of Julian before the Battle of Argentoratum, who informed the Romans about the state of the enemy army and its location.⁷ First, however, the barbarians learned about the size of Julian's force from the account of a Roman traitor.⁸

A leader well-versed in the art of war could cunningly exploit the hapless prisoner to raise the spirits of the army. This is described, e.g. in Book VII of *Strategikon*, where the author illustrates his knowledge of human nature:

4 Another example could be the attitude towards the appearance of one's own soldiers. Authors of military treatises agreed that the better a soldier looks, the better he fights. We can also find claims that based on how good an army looks, the more frightening it seems to the enemy.

5 Intimidating through one's advantage is a well-researched issue, although in our times it is not physical strength, but a disproportion in power that is used. Pieter, *Strach i odwaga*, 93–94.

6 On the subject: Theotokis, *Byzantine Military Tactics*, 165–171. He emphasized the considerable distrust of Roman commanders of information from captives. The situation where both a male and his family were in captivity was an exception to this. Then, the commander could obtain information from the woman, or even the children. *Byzantini liber De Re Militari*, 18. 30–33.

7 Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 12. 19.

8 Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 12. 2.

If any foes should be captured by our patrols or if any deserters make their way to us, and they are well equipped and healthy, we should not let them be seen by our own men, but rather secretly send the prisoners away. However; if they look miserable, we need to make sure that the whole army gets a look at them; they should be stripped, paraded before our troops and forced to beg for their lives, so as to make our men believe that all the enemy's soldiers are the same.⁹

The above passage exemplifies the attitude of Roman commanders to warfare, and how they used any opportunity that presented itself to gain an edge over the enemy and motivate their troops. Prisoners were already used in various ways to achieve specific outcomes.¹⁰ The author of the treatise explained how in certain situations their presence can be used to bolster the morale of your army. In order to do that, some conditions had to be met: if the captured enemy soldiers were poorly-equipped and seemed malnourished or weak, they should be exhibited (ἐπιδείνυμι)¹¹ before the whole army.¹² This public demonstration was to include almost theatrical aspects – the prisoner would not only appear pathetic, but was also made to beg for his life in front of all Roman soldiers. It was implied that the Roman commander was the one showing mercy, symbolizing that he holds the life or death of the enemy in his hands, granting one or the other with a mere gesture. By diminishing the fear of the enemy, the leader automatically raised his own standing in the eyes of his soldiers. After such a spectacle it is easy to imagine the reaction of the audience, even if the enemy had beaten the Roman army in the past. By witnessing this carefully directed show of strength, the legionnaires would become convinced of their superiority. They would think that if all the enemy are so weak,

9 Strat. 7A. 5.

10 See, for example: Robert C. Doyle, *The Enemy in Our Hands: America's Treatment of Enemy Prisoners of War from the Revolution to the War on Terror* (Washington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010); Rémy Ambühl, *Prisoners of War in the Hundred Years War: Ransom Culture in the Late Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Arnold Krammer, *Prisoners of War: A Reference Handbook* (Washington: Praeger, 2008).

11 Like animals in a cage. See: Herodotus, *Historiae*, 2. 42.

12 This is exactly what Agesilaos did, presenting to his Spartans a group of effeminate and richly-dressed Athenian prisoners. Supposedly, he also cried: *This is who we are fighting against, and this – is what we can win!*, at the same time blocking the fear of his men with the sight of the frail bodies of their enemies and encouraging them to fight with the promise of rich spoils. Polyaeus, 2. 1. 6. A similar thing was done by Gelon, the tyrant of Syracuse, who specifically selected the most miserable looking Carthaginian prisoners and then exhibited them naked to the public. Frontinus, 1. 11. 18.

poorly-equipped and cowardly, then facing up against them should not be too hard.¹³ This feeling of superiority would be additionally compounded by the community of soldiers. The whole army was gathered in one place, united by its common culture and brotherhood of arms, and before them stood a pitiful, rather than frightening barbarian soldier, begging the Roman commander for mercy. A community based on brute strength, like the army, would not pity the enemy. In effect, their fear would be replaced by contempt. This process is well-known in the literature on the subject; it instills courage by depreciating the values related to the object of fear.¹⁴ Fighting fear is effective only if it focuses on cause-and-effect. For the stratagem described in *Strategikon* this was exactly the case; the cause of fear was the enemy and when his strength was diminished it reduced anxiety and inspired courage in Roman soldiers.

A similar trick was advised by the author of the *Tactica*, but he suggested using it against enemy prisoners.¹⁵ Similar factors would come into play here,¹⁶ but the reverse outcome was expected, that is to cause fear among enemy ranks by using prisoners. The Roman commander was to select his most imposing men, equip them with the best arms and armor available in the whole army, and then present them before captured enemies. The soldiers of the opposing side would have no idea that they were watching a fabricated spectacle. After marching them through the Roman camp, where they would see only towering troopers clad in the very best equipment, prisoners were allowed to return to their own forces, convinced about the might of the Roman army, often also given false information about the planned movements of the Romans.¹⁷ As a result, the imperial commander would not only sow confusion among enemy ranks with false intelligence, but would also directly impact their morale. The barbarians returning to their lines bore news about the powerful Roman army, with its excellent equipment, preparing for combat. This was exploited also by Titus Didius, who deliberately allowed prisoners to escape in order to spread false information.¹⁸ Since these were eyewitness accounts, it made them more

13 This perception could be further reinforced with reports, even fabricated ones, about Roman victories over the enemy on other fronts.

14 J. Pieter describes similar ways of fighting fear; in his examples it is not the object of fear that is depreciated, but its causes. E.g. a soldier fights better if they at least partially let go of the fear of their own death. So, the object of deprecation is the value of a soldier's life. Pieter, *Strach i odwaga*, 187. See also McGurk, Castro, "Courage in Combat," 171–173.

15 *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 17. 91.

16 Interestingly, in his commentary to *Tactica* J. Haldon points to *Strategikon* and the work of Onasander as the primary sources (also referring to the events of the 10th century as explanation). See: Haldon, *A Critical Commentary on the Taktika*, 330.

17 Strat. 8B. 29.

18 Frontinus, 1. 8. 5.

impactful and believable. Even if the enemy commander expected a ruse and paid no heed to the accounts, rumors would have spread among the rank and file. This trick was copied over from earlier works,¹⁹ but the author of *Tactica* added his own twist in equipping the soldiers with the best available gear. As a side note, the fact that the commander had to gather the best-looking arms and armor from among the rest of the army and distribute it only to the most imposing troopers meant that the army itself was not in the best state.

Sylloge Tacticorum contains the most complete description of the fate of captives after a victorious battle. In the 10th century, captives were divided into groups. Some of the enemy soldiers were treated like any other spoils of war by Romans²⁰ and the better born ones²¹ were mainly exchanged for Roman soldiers.²² The author also recommended abstaining from killing captives in the course of fighting, because the enemy might reciprocate by killing captured Romans. On the other hand, if after a battle the enemy army was not interested in ransoming its soldiers, the commander could let them starve or have them executed.²³ The notion of revenge on the enemy comes into play here, clearly emphasized by the author of *Sylloge Tacticorum*: killing enemy captives was an act of vengeance intended to instill fear in the enemy.²⁴ Therefore, captives became an element of psychological warfare and their tragic fate was meant as a deterrent.

19 Similar tricks can be found, e.g. in *Strategikon*.

20 Taxiarchis Koliass, "Kriegsgefangene, Sklavenhandel und die Privilegien der Soldaten. Die Aussage der Novelle von Ioannes Tzimiskes," *Byzantinoslavica* 56 (1995): 129–135.

21 Some of the best born and the most prominent captives ended up in Constantinople and were received with honors by the emperor himself. See Liliana Simeonova, "In the depths of tenth-century Byzantine ceremonial: the treatment of Arab prisoners of war at imperial banquets," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 22 (1998): 75–104.

22 *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 50. 6.

23 *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 50. 8.

24 Of course the most famous example of brutal treatment of captives was the fate of the Bulgarians after defeat in the battle of Kleidion (1014). More in Catherine Holmes, "Basil II the Bulgar-slayer and the Blinding of 15 000 Bulgarians in 1014: Mutilation and Prisoners of War in the Middle Ages," in *How Fighting Ends: A History of Surrender*, ed. Holger Afflerbach, Hew Strachan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 85–95; Peter Schreiner, "Die vermeintliche Blendung. Zu den Ereignissen von Kleidion im Jahr 1014," in *Европейският Югоизток през втората половина на X – началото на XI век. История и култура*, ed. Vasil Gyuzelev and George H. Nikolov (Sofia: Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 2015), 170–190. From the Bulgarian perspective: Toma Tomov, *Ключ 1014 г.* (Sofia: New Bulgarian University, 2015). See also a study of the fate of Byzantine soldiers in Bulgarian captivity: Yanko Hristov, "A Glimpse at the Fate of the Byzantine Prisoners of War in Bulgaria during the Period from 976 to 1018," *Enoxu* 27/2 (2019): 406–414; Yanko Hristov, "Prisoners of War in Early Medieval Bulgaria (Preliminary Remarks)," *Studia Ceranea* 5 (2015): 73–105.

Meanwhile, Syrianus Magister²⁵ warned the commanders of distant observation posts against former prisoners who had managed to escape enemy captivity. According to the author there were cases when these minor fortified posts, located right on the border, would be captured by enemy soldiers posing as Romans that had supposedly escaped their captors. Syrianus goes on to explain that the enemies of the Empire could even dress such imposters in actual Roman gear in order to corroborate their stories.²⁶ Once these false escapees approached the sentries, they suddenly attacked, took control of the entrance to the post, and then dispatched the rest of the company.²⁷ As a result, the armies guarded by such observation posts remained oblivious to the enemy raid, which could potentially be very dangerous. The invading force was then also able to surprise the civilian population, which could not foresee this threat. This confirms that, in warfare, both sides were able to employ stratagems that made use of prisoners.

2 Scouts

Before the actual engagement took place, it often happened that the leaders of the opposing forces attempted to learn more about the enemies – their strength, equipment²⁸ and fighting spirit.²⁹ This pre-battle intelligence was crucial to the outcome of the coming clash,³⁰ so armies employed any means available to them in order to achieve advantage. Scouting units were also used to manipulate the morale of the enemy army. Commanders would dispatch outriders and spies who wore top-of-the-line equipment and looked the most

25 Syrianus, 7. 23–28.

26 Syrianus, 7. 23–24.

27 Although no sources offer proof, we can imagine that this is what befell many Roman forts in the Balkans during the raids of Slavs and Avars.

28 Interestingly, the author of *Praecepta militaria* drew attention to the need of listing the enemy army's equipment and the number of soldiers. If the enemy troops were bigger and better equipped, hit-and-run tactics were recommended to weaken the opponent's morale and force him to retreat. *Praecepta militaria*, 4. 19.

29 Strat. 7B. 3. On the other hand, doing everything to prevent the enemy from scouting out his own army.

30 About the importance of tactical reconnaissance in Boris Rankov and Jacqueline E. Austin. *Exploratio: Military & Political Intelligence in the Roman World from the Second Punic War to the Battle of Adrianople* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 39–87. About Roman military reconnaissance although only related to the sea in Vassilios Christides, "Military Intelligence in Arabo-Byzantine Naval Warfare," in *Το εμπόλεμο Βυζάντιο (905–1205 αι.) | Byzantium at War (9th–12th c.)*, ed. Kostas Tsiknakis (Athens: Goulandri-Horn Foundation, 1997), 269–281.

impressive. Their task was to observe the opposing army, usually at a distance, and in the case of scouting units – to additionally “gather intelligence”³¹ and skirmish with their counterparts on the other side.³² The initial phase of a battle was often fought by these advance units³³ and sometimes the result of these skirmishes would affect the morale of the whole army; it was particularly important when encountering a new opponent, as described in the previous chapter. In the Middle Byzantine period, the author of *Praecepta militaria* recommended reconnaissance units as the first force tasked with setting up ambushes and causing panic in the enemy troops.³⁴ Interestingly, reconnaissance was sometimes so effective that it impacted the course of the fighting. In 589/590, during an attack by Baram, a Persian commander, on Roman territory, the Roman *strategos* managed to force the enemy to fight when they were already retreating to their territory.³⁵ Allegedly, the attacks by Roman skirmishers were so effective that they annihilated the enemy reconnaissance. Then, Roman cavalry reached the Persian camp, surprising both Baram, and the Romans themselves, who had not expected such success.³⁶ The Roman commander was so astonished at the victory over the larger Persian force that he decided against continuing the fight, which his soldiers later held against him.³⁷ In subsequent days, Persian morale must have started to sag because Romans were able to attack the much larger enemy force across the river and

31 A good example is how the scouts of Marcus Cato operated in Spain. A selected Roman unit of thirty riders captured a prisoner, who under torture revealed the plans of the barbarian forces. Frontinus, 1. 2. 5.

32 John Haldon also presented the key importance of information in Roman warfare; he noted that it was of significance especially in the course of planning defensive strategies in case of the enemy's invasion. In this situation, planning defense depended on accurate information about the route of the enemy army, its equipment and size. More in Haldon, “Information and War,” 373–396. About the importance of information in planning foreign policy in Late Antiquity in Lee, *Information and Frontiers*, about spies on pages 170–181. About gleaning information from the point of view of diplomacy also in Jonathan Shepard, “Information, disinformation and delay in Byzantine diplomacy,” *Byzantinische Forschungen* 10 (1985): 233–93.

33 It was also possible for a clash between scout and outrider units to spontaneously evolve into a pitched battle. See, e.g. the battle near Kolchida that began as an engagement between two thousand skirmishers: Sym. 3. 7. 10.

34 *Praecepta militaria*, 2. 3. Another task of the reconnaissance was taking captives who, interrogated, were to provide information about the enemy army.

35 Sym. 3. 7. 9. Interestingly, before setting off, the Roman commander selected his soldiers and took only the best.

36 Sym. 3. 7. 10.

37 Sym. 3. 7. 12–14. It is equally interesting that this was not the end of the fighting, and the two armies fought once again.

destroy them in direct combat, forcing the survivors to flee in panic.³⁸ This example shows that when used correctly, reconnaissance units could affect the result of a battle. It also illustrates the importance of morale on the battlefield and how the result of a battle could be reversed by a single unit with an effective commander and willingness to fight. Another example comes from 971. During the campaign against Svyatoslav, Emperor Tzimiskes used selected soldiers to conduct reconnaissance under the command of Theodor of Mistheia; they were also tasked with engaging the enemy. A reconnaissance unit attacked the Rus' so unexpectedly and so forcefully that three hundred scouts allegedly forced seven thousand opponents to flee.³⁹ The above examples show that correctly deployed and well-equipped scouts with high morale could not only collect information but even instigate combat with surprising results.

Another method of gathering intelligence was using spies,⁴⁰ who were tasked with infiltrating enemy ranks and observing the army directly – obviously, this was a high-risk endeavor. Vegetius, though he did not devote much attention to scouting units,⁴¹ did include a section in *De Re Militari* on preparation for battle, where he describes in detail what a commander should know about the enemy before the fighting starts. It is worth looking at this list of necessary information, especially since some of it could only be learned by scouts and spies:

Another important aspect is to learn about the character of the enemy commander, his closest aides and high-ranking officers: are they reckless or careful, bold or reserved, do they know warcraft and have training in it, or are they driven by blind courage. You need to know if their allies are brave or cowardly, and if we can put faith in the loyalty and courage of our own auxiliary troops – furthermore, what is the overall mood among the enemy soldiers, and our own units. In essence, attempt to predict which side has better chances of emerging victorious.⁴²

38 Sym. 3. 7. 17–18.

39 Skylitzes, 299.

40 Syrianus Magister wrote at length about spies and their work for the Roman army. Syrianus, 42. See also the opinion of the author of *Strategikon*. Strat. 9. 5. On using spies outside battle, including priests and travelers collecting information in inns, ports and during trading, see Theotokis, *Byzantine Military Tactics*, 148–158.

41 Vegetius suggests that even the task of road reconnaissance should be given to someone other than scouting units (the commander was to purchase a good map of the territory and hire guides). Veg. 3. 6.

42 Veg. 3. 9.

Most of this intelligence would be gathered by competent scouts, who should themselves possess specific traits. Soldiers sent out on scouting missions were selected personally by the commander, based on whether or not they had the appropriate skills. The author of *Strategikon* describes quite accurately the desirable characteristics of a Roman scout trooper of Late Antiquity:

Scouts should be selected from soldiers who are reliable, trustworthy, keen-eyed, serious and not greedy; such people will give accurate reports. Whereas those who are reckless, cowardly and easily excitable about material goods may provide false reports and, by doing so, expose the commander and the entire army to danger.⁴³

A scout (here referred to as *κατάσκοπος*, which can be translated both as a scout and a spy) was to be exceptionally fit, trustworthy/faithful (*πιστός*), quick-witted (*δξύς*) and decisive (*σπουδαίος*); he also had to be someone who would not accept a bribe, and would not give a false report⁴⁴ in the hopes of receiving a reward from the commander.⁴⁵ And it should be mentioned that similar situations likely did happen, since the author of *Strategikon* advised the army leaders to observe everything with their own eyes, if at all possible, rather than base their decisions on scouting reports.⁴⁶ The purpose of scouting activities on the battlefield was significant, so if a commander was to trust anything found in the reports that he received, he had to have confidence in his intelligence specialists. A report could change the course of the whole battle, and potentially mean the difference between life and death for a lot of people. This is why advance troopers were picked from among the best soldiers, with specific, stable personalities, who would not panic at the sight of the enemy and would not exaggerate in their reports. It is worth noting that already in Antiquity similar traits were considered desirable in soldiers⁴⁷ tasked with all responsible assignments. In any other case, a commander could potentially make decisions that would put the whole army in danger, based on false or

43 Strat. 8B. 26.

44 *Naumachiai*, 6. 1–2. In the case of naval warfare, soldiers serving as oarsmen in scouting ships should be courageous and strong (which had a direct correlation to the ship's speed). See also very similar requirements related to the origin and skills of Roman spies. *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 25. 1–3.

45 This means that outriders were motivated to take risks by being offered monetary rewards for completing the assigned task.

46 Strat. 8B. 25.

47 Aeneas Tacticus, 5. Aeneas Tacticus stated that any soldier assigned to guarding the gate should be wealthy, and should have a wife and children in the city, which served as warranty of his loyalty.

inaccurate intelligence. Similar traits were also expected of officers leading scouting parties, who were to be exceptional fighters of high intelligence and extensive experience.⁴⁸ Courage was not the most crucial feature for scouts, contrary to spies, who had to be bold almost to the point of insanity.⁴⁹ An experienced reconnaissance specialist should be able to assess the strength of the opposing force by listening to the beating of hooves on the ground or examining the site of an abandoned camp.⁵⁰ Men such as these were a rare commodity in an army, which made them all the more valuable for any Roman *strategos*. Although reconnaissance parties were formed out of the best soldiers and led by the best commanders the army had to offer, they should be kept under close scrutiny and be subject to unexpected inspections.⁵¹ If any misconduct was discovered, both the unit leader and all his men were to be severely punished for putting the whole Roman force in danger.

Turning once again to *Strategikon*, we can find interesting guidelines on how to employ your own scouting units in extreme situations. The author of the treatise was aware that some of these advance troops may be captured by the enemy while performing their tasks.⁵² He advised commanders to exploit this fact to their advantage, by impacting the morale of the enemy directly with the sight of Roman prisoners. In this way, the Romans actually used a reverse version of the tactic described several pages ago, related to the handling of enemy prisoners. Since in this situation the Roman soldier was expected to be captured, the army leader should make certain that the sight of this soldier will terrify enemy troops and discourage them from ever raising their weapons against Rome. This was a completely deliberate decision aimed at achieving a specific effect – fear. From *Strategikon* we learn the following:

Scouts should be trustworthy and look impressive, better than our other soldiers, also in terms of equipment. When confronted by the enemy, they will make a fine impression, and if captured – will inspire awe with their appearance and weapons.⁵³

As was already mentioned, this was a reverse implementation of the fear-inducing mechanisms described in the previous chapter. If the first Roman

48 Strat. 9. 5.

49 Strat. 9. 5.

50 See, for a later period: *De velitatione bellica*, 8.

51 Strat. 9. 5. More on reconnaissance in Theotokis, *Byzantine Military Tactics*, 128–141.

52 A case in point would be the barbarian scout captured before the Battle of Argentoratum; he was not fast enough, which is why he was taken captive by the Romans.

53 Strat. 9. 5. 55–58.

soldiers sighted by the enemy were the outriders (this time the author uses the term *σκουλκάτος*⁵⁴ instead of *κατάσκοπος*, clearly emphasizing that he refers to a scouting unit) then the Romans had to make sure that their advance units stood out from the common legionnaires and were better equipped. The primary task of reconnaissance troops was to assess the opponent's strength,⁵⁵ the army structure and possible marching routes; information of this sort was crucial to achieve victory in the coming clash.⁵⁶ The enemy obviously reacted to this, making every effort to thwart the Roman scouting mission. This usually meant an attempt to engage the reconnaissance party and defeat it in combat. If the scouts were routed and taken as prisoners, Romans would attempt to make use of the same mechanism that was employed in the case of captured barbarian soldiers. Scout troopers were to be clad in high-quality weapons and armor, brave, quick-witted and physically impressive⁵⁷ – all these qualities were to negatively impact the enemy's morale right before the clash of the main forces. On the other hand, we must not forget that in the period leading up to

54 The word comes from military jargon and has Latin etymology. It is probably derived from the word *sculca*, although some linguists seem to indicate a Germanic influence (*skulk*); however, according to Marichal this theory is indefensible: Robert Marichal, *Les Ostraca de Bu Njem* (Tripoli: Grande Jamahira Arabe, Libyenne, Populaire et Socialiste, Département des Antiquités, 1992), 68–70. Vegetius uses the term *exculcatores*, but that did not refer to advance units, but rather light infantry, from which scouts could be recruited. Veg. 2. 14. Theophylact Simocatta also uses this term when referring to soldiers on guard duty, or rather lack thereof: *τοίνυν οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι φρονηματισθέντες ἐπὶ τοῖς συγκυρήσασι πρὸς τρυφὴν κατακλίνοντο, εἶτα τῆ μέθῃ συρράπτονται, καὶ τῆ παροινίᾳ τὰς εὐπραξίας νοθεύσαντες τῆ διαφρουρᾶς κατημέλησαν, ἦν σκούλκων σύνηθες τῆ πατρίῳ φωνῇ Ῥωμαίοις ἀποκαλεῖν*. Sym. 6. 9. 14. What is more, Simocatta clearly notes that the word *sculca* is derived from Latin. It is worth pointing out that the term *exculcatorias* (or, according to Rance: *sculcatorias*, Rance, “The fulcum”, footnote 88) appeared in the work of Cassiodorus: Cassiodorus, 2. 20, and referred to scouting ships (*atque ideo praesenti decernimus iussione, ut quantas in Ravennati urbe exculcatorias potueris reperire, frumentis fiscalibus oneratas ad nos usque perducas, quatenus alimonia publica tali provisione relevata necessitatem inopiae non debeant sustinere.*), although in the opinion of J. Rougé, Cassiodorus used it to describe transport ships; Jean Rougé, “Sur un mot de Cassiodore: Exculcatorias – Sculcatorias – Sulcatorias,” *Latomus* 21 (1962): 384–390. The fact that Cassiodorus explains why the ships were carrying grain and tributes may suggest that this was simply a non-regular use of scouting units and not necessarily that the author was describing transport ships. The interesting thing is that the author of *Strategikon* used the term only in relation to scouts or scouting activities, with numerous variations in form: *σκούλκα*, *σκουλκεύω*, *σκυλκάτος*, *σκυλκάτωρ*, *σκουλκεύω*.

55 A Roman outrider had to take all possible precautions to remain unnoticed. One of the methods of hiding their presence was wearing long cloaks over their mail, which prevented the equipment from reflecting sunshine. Strat. 1. 2.

56 See: Veg. 3. 6; Strat. 9. 5.

57 Strat. 2. 11.

a pitched battle both sides of the conflict would engage in true information warfare. This was perfectly exemplified during the invasion of Roman territories by the Persian satrap, Baram, in 589/590. Theophylact Simocatta described how a *strategos* named Roman sent out 50 soldiers on a scouting mission to observe the Persian forces, and he also pointed out that the Persians employed spies for the same purpose. The Persian detachment, disguised as Romans, was able to deceive the 50 scouts and lead them into an ambush, which resulted in most of the Romans being captured. Baram had no qualms about using torture to gather information about the strength and quality of the imperial army.⁵⁸ A scouting mission could have such unintended consequences, since even the bravest soldiers could be made to talk under duress.

In the event of a defeat at the hands of a Roman reconnaissance unit, the opposing soldiers would hear rumors about the magnificent equipment and exceptional skills of the imperial forces, who easily dispatched the barbarians. If ever a Roman scout was captured, these rumors became fact. The sight of these prisoners⁵⁹ was not supposed to make the barbarians feel superior, but rather make them afraid. As was mentioned, these advance troopers had high morale,⁶⁰ proud bearing, imposing physiques and equipment of the highest quality. If the enemy soldiers saw such prisoners,⁶¹ their reaction would inevitably be fear. In this simple, albeit cynical fashion it was possible to sow terror among enemy ranks, even if it were Roman troopers that were taken prisoner. The key factor was to select suitable men for the job.

Summing up, scouting units had a very responsible role to play even before the battle began. It was their duty to gather intelligence on the opposing army, its strength and the route it would take. If the situation demanded, scouts were also sent to clash with the enemy advance units in order to get more information or improve the morale of the main Roman force by bringing news about successful skirmishes.⁶² If a scout was captured, he was to make an impression on his enemies, inspiring fear through his looks, noble bearing⁶³ and quality arms and armor. This was an intentional and cynical approach of Roman commanders, who took every opportunity to gain an advantage over the enemy.

58 Sym. 3. 7. 2–8.

59 Strat. 9. 5. The author of *Strategikon* described reconnaissance troopers as brave, intelligent and standing out physically from the rest of the army.

60 Strat. 9. 5. 51–58.

61 The author of *Strategikon* advised sending impressive-looking enemy prisoners away to the back lines, in secret. Strat. 8B. 29.

62 Commanders would sometimes motivate the soldiers with rumors about how the enemy had been defeated on other fronts. Strat. 8A. 8.

63 Strat. 9. 5.

3 *Barditus/barritus/nobiscum*

Nobiscum, written by the author of *Strategikon* using the Greek lettering – νοβισκούμ,⁶⁴ and translated as a “battle cry”,⁶⁵ was always seen as a powerful tool to improve morale and encourage warriors to fight.⁶⁶ The battle cry was known already in the times of Homer,⁶⁷ it was also present in the classical period during the Peloponnesian War⁶⁸ in the form of the Athenian *alala*.⁶⁹ So, the history of the war cry can be traced back to the bronze age, continuing through Antiquity and Middle Ages (*Deus lo volt*⁷⁰ or *Desperta ferro!*),⁷¹ all the way to the modern confederate *rebel yell* and the contemporary Japanese *banzai*, American *hooah*⁷² and *oorah*⁷³ or the Slavic *hurra* in different versions.

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- 64 It is worth noting that the term *nobiscum* (νοβισκούμ) appears a number of times in the treatise (Strat. 2. 18; 7B. 16), which may mean that this Latinism was part of military jargon. For more on the subject of Latin terminology in *Strategikon*, see: Mihăescu, “Les éléments latins des *Tactica*,” 261–272; Mihăescu, “Les éléments latins des *Tactica*,” 481–498; Mihăescu, “Les éléments latins des *Tactica*,” 155–166, 267–280. Haralambie Mihăescu clearly emphasized that elements of Latin in the military terminology of the end of the 6th century were part of Roman tradition. It remains an open question to what extent Latin was present in the everyday life of soldiers and if it really was the language in which orders were given. However, it is an indisputable fact that the Roman army was multilingual when the treatise was being written. The author himself wrote that the military mandator (μανδάτωρ) and cantator (καντάτωρ – another calque from Latin) should know Latin, Greek and, if possible, also Persian. Strat. 12B. 7.
- 65 Earlier terms like *barditus/barritus* that appear in Latin are actually of German origin, see: TLL v. 2, p. 1750.
- 66 The use of a battle cry was briefly described by Ross Cowan: Cowan, “The Clashing of Weapons,” 114–117, disputing the arguments of A.K. Goldsworthy about staying silent before throwing the *pila* in the republican period. The interesting thing is that both scholars refer to *Strategikon* in their argumentation, suggesting that its author considered the battle cry to be objectionable and prohibited its use entirely. As this sub-chapter will show, the reality was quite different, and the author of *Strategikon* very consciously, advised either for or against the use of a battle cry depending on the situation. For later periods, see: Pépin Guilhem, “Les cris de guerre „Guyenne!” et „Saint George!”. L’expression d’une identité politique du duché d’Aquitaine anglo-gascon,” *Le Moyen Age* 62 (2006): 263–281.
- 67 See the example of Hector attacking with a battle cry at the head of the Trojan troops (Iliad, 5. 341) or the Trojans raising war cries while following Hector into combat (Iliad, 12. 113–114).
- 68 Athenian hoplites going into battle shouted Ἀλάλα.
- 69 We should also mention that according to Hesiod the cry had political undertones, since its sound was similar to the call of an owl, i.e. a bird inextricably linked to the goddess Athena and Athens.
- 70 During the crusades – *God wills it!*
- 71 During the Reconquista in Spain – *Awake iron!*
- 72 The battle cry of the US Army.
- 73 The battle cry of the US Marines.

It could be argued that whenever there was a fight, there you would also find battle cries, which the soldiers employed to strengthen their spirit and resolve when confronting the enemy and staring death in the face. This method of motivation, and in certain cases deliberate effort to build *esprit de corps*⁷⁴ was an unchanging feature of any battlefield throughout the ages. It was also the case in the Antiquity. In a classical work by Tacitus there is a poetic passage describing the battle cry or war chant of the advancing Germanic peoples, who were trying to raise their spirits and inspire a feeling of camaraderie in their ranks, and terror in their enemies:⁷⁵

They mostly tend to shout in harsh voices, or utter broken grumbles, holding shields next to the lips so that the sound is deeper, more resonant, magnified.⁷⁶

The quote illustrates how a battle cry could be a powerful weapon in and of itself.⁷⁷ The mechanism of employing a shout has deeply psychological grounds and affects both sides – those that shout and those that are shouted at.⁷⁸ The war cry was used to terrorize opponents; the gradually rising volume described by Tacitus was a cleverly thought-out strategy. The approaching army increased the strength of their cry, which combined with the sight of hundreds of warriors bearing down on the Roman lines could cause panic

74 This applies mainly to modern armies. A good example is the US Army, where the war cry is often used outside of combat, mainly as a means of distinguishing between different types of armed forces. This allows soldiers to build a sense of belonging to a unit and helps them to identify with specific branches of military.

75 The louder the enemy screams, the stronger they seem to be – this behavior is related to battlefield psychology.

76 Tacitus, *De origine et situ Germanorum*, 3–4.

77 During the expedition of Emperor Valens against the Alemanni, Ammianus wrote that on the flanks the main weapons used by the Romans were a terrifying noise and the sound of trumpets – i.e. non-military means. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 27. 10.13.

78 It was a similar case with the mockers, who provoked the other side before the battle with their behavior and words. This was also the significance of skirmishes prior to the engagement, which sometimes drastically affected the morale of the losing side, like for example after Emperor Heraclius's victory over a Persian commander during the Battle of Nineveh. This is consistent with the image of a heroic commander who was an aristocrat affecting the course of a battle during a duel. The notion was developed in Homer's times. More in Hans van Wees, "Kings in combat: battles and heroes in the Iliad," *Classical Quarterly* 38/1 (1988): 1–24. Of slightly lesser importance, see e.g. the duel between a Roman traitor in Goth service named Kokkas with an Armenian called Anzalas; the Armenian's victory was met with an intense reaction from the whole Roman army. Procopius Caesarensis, *De Bellis*, 8. 31. The issue was analyzed in more detail in: Whately, *Battles and Generals*, 98.

among the defenders, resulting in a rout – first, the mentally weakest soldiers would retreat and then, according to the mechanism of conformity, the whole army could follow in their steps.⁷⁹ So, the war cry was a psychological weapon that when used in tandem with other factors could lead to the enemy fleeing in panic. It was used deliberately, especially by barbarian peoples, whose warcraft was based rather on using brute force than tactical brilliance. Under these conditions, intimidating the enemy with a loud battle cry could ensure victory in battle. In reality, the application of this specific psychological weapon was as straightforward as possible. We must also remember that a war cry would have a positive influence on the attackers by relieving some of their stress and, in some cases, building camaraderie.

Before we move on to analyzing the issue of the battle cry in the Roman army of the Late Antiquity, we must first study what its effects were on both sides of the conflict, since it affected both the defenders and the side that decided to advance, accompanied by a battle chant or a war cry. Such a sound, hundreds of voices strong, emboldened the charging soldiers, granted them a feeling of unity and power and to a degree blocked the fear response in units coming face to face with the enemy. This was particularly useful if the army included many inexperienced soldiers that were anxious before their first taste of combat.⁸⁰ We need to bear in mind that staying put and waiting to receive the assault was one thing,⁸¹ and it was something different entirely to charge on horseback or on foot into pointed spears and drawn swords, which required from soldiers not only a feeling of duty and brotherhood, but also immense courage.⁸² Moreover, a loud and powerful shout improved unit cohesion and its effects were intensified by – in this instance desirable – conformity. Everyone was shouting, simultaneously giving release to their emotions and allowing themselves to be swept by them; soldiers shouted at the terrifying enemy, shouting out their own fear, at the same time intimidating those that caused it. The intensity of emotions in this situation was overwhelming and made the soldiers surge forward. It was no coincidence that war cries were mainly employed during a head-on charge

79 Most of barbarian peoples acted the same, e.g. the Huns or Slavs. Otto Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns: Studies in Their History and Culture* (London: University of California Press, 1973), 201–203. On the subject of Slavs: Łukasz Różycki, “Sztuka wojenna Słowian w świetle dzieła Teofilakta Symokatty,” *Slavia Antiqua* 62 (2016): 53–76.

80 Much attention to preparing inexperienced soldiers for combat was given by Vegetius. The issue is also discussed in detail in the chapter devoted to fighting fear.

81 Veg. 2. 17. Stating that during combat heavy Roman infantry should stand immovable as a steel wall, repelling enemy attacks.

82 In this situation, a soldier had to overcome three major stressors: fear, sadness and anger. McGurk, Castro, “Courage in Combat,” 168; 171.

on enemy formations. Carried on by conformity and the strength of their own emotions, soldiers were more eager to clash with the enemy and their assault had more force behind it.⁸³ However, using this tactic also introduced certain disadvantages. Most importantly, soldiers shouting battle cries give in to their feelings, lose their composure and become fixated on clashing with the enemy as soon as possible. Reason is replaced with raw emotions, mostly the desire to kill the enemy soldiers responsible for the feeling of stress. This makes the shouting soldier want to quickly close the distance to his opponent and engage in combat, thus ending the nerve-wracking period of waiting for the inevitable fight. In barbarian armies, or in the event of assaulting an enemy line this is a desirable effect; but the situation is completely different for armies that adhere to a tactical order of battle.⁸⁴ In the latter case, any soldier that charges out of formation without a clear order, driven by emotions, and beyond the control of their superiors, can disrupt the adopted tactics, spoil a carefully laid plan and even lead to a general charge or assault,⁸⁵ risking the outcome of the entire battle. This means that a war cry had some inherent flaws, especially for armies that operated according to certain tactical schemata that required discipline from soldiers in combat – “good order” (εὐτακτος).⁸⁶

Roman theoreticians of warfare were well aware of this fact, so the use of battle cries on the battlefield was a complex issue⁸⁷ that took into account different phases of engaging the enemy, as well as combat itself. It is worth

83 The history of research into conformity, especially the impact of an individual on a community, is presented by Martin Robin and Miles Hewstone, “Conformity and Independence in Groups: Majorities and Minorities,” in *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Group Processes*, ed. Michael A. Hogg and Scott Tindale (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 209–213.

84 Order contrasted with chaos on the battlefield was to the Romans equal to the difference between the civilized world and *orbis barbarorum*. This is evident when studying the work of Procopius of Caesarea, who associated disorder with barbarians, as well as with Roman leaders making mistakes in the field. This was the case with Peter, who despite being given a different command set up his camp too close to fortifications. Procopius described his forces as moving without order (κόσμος οὐδενί) Procopius Caesarensis, *De Bellis*, 2.18.18. For an excellent analysis, refer to: Whately, *Battles and Generals*, 89–92. A similar contrasting of order and chaos, on a state level, can be seen in the work of Theophylact Simocatta. See more in: Igor V. Krivouchine, “Théophylacte Simocatta, peintre du chaos,” *Études Balcaniques* 1 (1994): 113–134; Igor V. Krivouchine, “Theophylact Simocatta’s Conception of Political Conflicts,” *Byzantinische Forschungen* 19 (1993): 171–183.

85 Once again, this is related to conformity, which is omnipresent on the battlefield. In this particular instance, soldiers prefer to give in to their emotions and engage the enemy, ending the stressful period of waiting for combat to begin.

86 McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth*, 326–327.

87 An excellent compilation of source accounts was included in an encyclopedic entry by Philip Rance, “War Cry,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Roman Army*. ed. Yann Le Bohec (Bingley: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 1070–1119.

analyzing the advice given by theoreticians in tandem with known examples of a battle cry, or its alternatives being used in action. To be consistent with the chronology, we will first look at the treatise by Vegetius:

Soldiers should only be allowed to raise battle cries – so-called *barritus* – once both sides had already engaged in *mêlée*, because then the enemy will be terrified not only of the hail of missiles, but also of the awful noise. Only fresh-faced recruits and cowards shout from afar. Enemies are more terrified if the warcry is combined with the sound of clashing weapons.⁸⁸

The battle cry that Vegetius mentions,⁸⁹ is the same one that was described by Tacitus (Vegetius: *barritus* – Tacitus: *barditus*), and the word itself is derived from the German language.⁹⁰ As was already mentioned, this type of stratagem was perfectly suited to brutal, barbarian warfare based on individual fighters' skills. This does not mean that it was not known to the Romans in the times of the Principate.⁹¹ Soldiers usually shouted battle cries after throwing their *pila* and launching a fierce assault against the enemy line. The situation changed after the reforms of Diocletian and Constantine, when the army started adopting more defensive tactical formations. In his description of the battle cry, Vegetius confirms what has already been brought up about its effects on both sides of the conflict. The advice from *De Re Militari* clearly refers to the tactical order maintained by the Romans. Soldiers were only allowed to raise battle cries when they were already in close combat, which no longer had much impact on their discipline, could actually be beneficial in mental terms, and perhaps even terrify the enemy.⁹² Vegetius points the attention of

88 Veg. 3. 18.

89 It is worth noting that the battle cry went into decline during the formative years of the Dominate. The Roman army evolved from its offensive attitude, characteristic of the republican legions, to a more defensive approach, in which tactics played a more important role. In the times of the Republic and the Principate the war cry was usually used right after the *pila* had been thrown and the legionnaires moved into attack; in the Dominate period both these aspects were eliminated, and the Roman infantry was supposed to receive the charge of the enemy and force them back. So, a battle cry was unnecessary and would only introduce confusion into the disciplined ranks of the army.

90 TLL, 1750. It was supposedly the war cry of the Cornuti in the times of Constantine the Great that was quickly adopted by the whole Roman army. Ammianus also noted the barbarian origins of the cry, compare: Ammianus, 16. 12. 43; 26. 7. 17; 31. 7. 11. See also: Andrew Alföldi and Marvin C. Ross. "Cornuti: A Teutonic Contingent in the Service of Constantine the Great and Its Decisive Role in the Battle at the Milvian Bridge. With a Discussion of Bronze Statuettes of Constantine the Great," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 13 (1959): 169–183.

91 See more in: Rance, "War Cry," 1070–1119.

92 It is difficult to determine what impact would a Roman battle cry have on the barbarians, who were used to shouting on the battlefield.

his readers to the fear-invoking aspect, mentioning that shouting could be more effective when combined with the sound of clashing weapons. In this context, a perfect example is the war cry described in Tacitus's *Germania*, used before engaging the opponent. A battle yell before clashing with the enemy line affected the soldiers receiving the charge as well as the barbarian warriors; the attackers felt encouraged and mentally prepared to face the enemy, to face death. It was a way of overcoming fear that, combined with the mechanism of conformity, yielded excellent results on the battlefield.

Vegetius does not explain why the Romans needed to avoid raising battle cries before combat has begun. Readers of *De Re Militari* could only guess that this method of affecting morale did not fit in with Roman warfare. It is only in *Strategikon* that we find an analysis of the tactical aspects of employing battle cries:

The battle cry called *nobiscum*, usually raised before commencing a charge, is to our mind highly dangerous. Employing it at that moment may lead to the army losing cohesion. Hearing it, anxious soldiers may waver, instead of engaging the enemy, whereas bolder ones may be overcome by rage and break formation to clash with their opponents that much quicker. The same issue affects horses, which have their own individual qualities. As a result, the battle line becomes disorderly and incohesive, and the whole formation is in danger of falling apart even before any contact with the enemy has been made, which is a serious threat.⁹³

The author of *Strategikon* corroborates what has already been stated above about human nature and battlefield psychology. A war cry was a potential hazard for the Roman formation, and since imperial tactics were based on discipline, it could actually be disastrous. The Roman army of the Late Antiquity was a professional fighting force, so trained patterns of behavior were valued higher than the courage⁹⁴ or skills of individual troopers.⁹⁵ If the formation

93 Strat. 2. 18. 2–12.

94 In contrast to the Ancient Greece period, where valor (*ἀνδρεία*) was the defining trait of any warrior. See: van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 192. Although it should be pointed out that with the changes in tactics, discipline became more prominent. In the classical period, when soldiers formed a phalanx there was no place for emotions such as fear, aggression or anger that could disrupt the formation and, consequently, result in defeat. van Wees, *Greek Warfare*, 192–3.

95 Rance, “War Cry,” 1070–1119. Once again, we need to remember that this began in the Dominate period; in earlier times Romans willingly employed battle cries either before or during the charge on the enemy.

was abandoned, which was a likely result of raising a battle cry, the tactics and training of a unit ceased to matter, and the emphasis was shifted to individual ability, which often meant that the Romans lost their primary advantage. In one-on-one fights, Roman soldiers would frequently be bested by barbarian warriors.⁹⁶ In the passage, the author distinguished between two categories of troopers that were especially susceptible to the effects of a battle cry: cowardly (δειλός) and bold (θρασύς).⁹⁷ Yet on both these groups the war cry had a clearly negative impact. The mentally weaker ones could be discouraged, stopping their attack before reaching the enemy formation. This would mean that only a portion of the army assaulted the opposing force, while another portion remained frozen in place, paralyzed by fear before the enemy lines.⁹⁸ Attacking in scattered groups instead of with a unified front was very risky – this way the Romans lost the advantage of training and their tactical edge.

The more courageous soldiers, as was already mentioned, could be pushed by a war-cry into attacking earlier than planned. The author of the treatise uses the term “overcome by rage” to refer to the complex system of emotions affecting a soldier. In consequence, this means that the soldier gives in to his emotions and throws himself into an assault, forgetting all tactical discipline and the previously adopted plan of action, striving to close the distance to the enemy as quickly as possible. This was a desirable outcome for barbarian armies, which focused their warcraft on raw physical strength and the combat skills of single warriors. But with the Roman approach to warfare, the effect would be just as harmful as the behavior of cowards. Not all Romans were brave. So, in the end, the assaulting army would be divided into three disjointed groups of soldiers: the bold ones, advancing; the cowardly ones, paralyzed in fear; and the regular troopers, caught up in the chaos, simply trying to maintain formation. In this situation, repelling a Roman attack would pose no difficulty; all it took was to dispatch the three separate groups one

96 In *Ecclesiastical History* by John of Ephesus we even find a literary topos about the Slavs. The leader of the church stated that not only did the Slavs learn the art of fighting from the Romans, but in a short time the students surpassed their teachers. Ioannes Ephesius, 6. 25.

97 But it needs to be emphasized that the word θρασύς often carries negative undertones, referring to recklessness, and describes someone overly brave, a risk-taker; the Latin equivalent is audacity – *audax*. Compare: ἡμέτεροι ἔταροι, σὺν δ' ὁ θρασύς ἔπειτ' Ὀδυσσεύς; *Odyssey*, 10. 436. Or Aeschylus, *Prometheus vincitus*, 180. See also: Stachura, “Psychologiczne motywacje żołnierskiej brawury,” 823–824.

98 This is an extreme situation, but we can assume that the less courageous soldiers advanced at a slower pace, staying far back behind the assaulting brave ones. This way, the Roman line would still be disrupted and what reached the enemy was a confused mass of troops, rather than a tactically cohesive formation.

after another. Any instance of breaking formation was considered a threat by Roman army leaders and punished accordingly, in line with military law.⁹⁹ In this context, a battle cry was an unwelcome occurrence on the battlefield for a number of reasons, and any breach of discipline was severely punished. There were, obviously, exceptions to this rule. During the Avar siege of Drizipara, the desperate defenders supposedly opened the gates to the city and:

Despite raising battle cries and forming a line, being in reality gripped by fear, they did not leave the city. Whereupon the barbarian army was stopped by some divine inspiration, as they were convinced that they saw an innumerable force of Romans marching out of the city in broad daylight and setting up on the plains in battle formation, teeming with bloodlust and ready to die in battle. The Khagan retreated immediately. And the enemy army was nothing more than a mirage, a trick of the eye, a paralysis of the mind.¹⁰⁰

Theophylact Simocatta weaved a supernatural occurrence into his narrative, assuming divine intervention occurred before the walls of Drizipara, but we can offer a different explanation based on the already presented analysis. It is possible that the Roman army left the city after the seven-day siege, deciding to engage the enemy on open ground, as a cohesive force. The Romans set up in tactical formation and raised battle cries, demonstrating to the barbarians their willingness to fight. The nomads could have been frightened by such a display of courage and strength (their minds were paralyzed, to paraphrase Simocatta). In the end, the besieging army decided to retreat. Khagan Bayan I likely calculated that even a victorious clash could result in a number of Avar casualties that would not have been worth the potential spoils taken from the city. Theophylact suggested that the actions of the Romans were merely a theatrical ruse, but nevertheless it was an effective display, which terrified the Avars and forced them to withdraw, and in this a major part was played by the battle cry that signified combat-readiness.

The above example illustrates that in Late Antiquity there were instances where war cries were allowed. The authors of treatises only warned their readers against using the shout immediately before the assault, advising rather to maintain tactical cohesion, even at the cost of the force of the charge. Similar

99 Strat. 1. 8. 16. According to the author of *Strategikon*, the penalty for breaking formation, regardless of the reason, was the same as for desertion, since the culprit put all his comrades and the whole army at risk.

100 Sym. 6. 5. 6–8.

views were expressed by Syrianus when describing naval battles. In his opinion, well-trained ship crews should attack the enemy in silence. A battle cry was only allowed if the crews were unreliable and required additional motivation to fight – in which case it was advisable to strike quickly and loudly.¹⁰¹ Also, in Book III of *Strategikon*, in the section advising on how to handle troops positioned in the second line of the formation, we find information about another use of battle cries by the Romans:

If the fate of the battle is hanging by a thread and, with the primary line of troops engaged, first one side then the other gains the advantage, then the second line should wait and see how the situation develops, raising three battle cries in order to encourage our own soldiers and discourage the enemies. They should take great care not to engage in battle too early and not to advance too close to the first line, which could lead to confusion among the ranks and result in unnecessary retreat.¹⁰²

And further, in the section of *Strategikon* devoted to maxims, on the battle cry itself:

The army whose soldiers can raise loud and resounding battle cries, will strike fear into the hearts of the enemy.¹⁰³

As evidenced by the examples above, the Romans were fully capable of employing war cries, using their positive aspects to the fullest in order to manipulate their own soldiers. In the first quoted passage it was the second line of soldiers that did the shouting – soldiers who not only were not directly engaged with the enemy but were actually expected not to get involved.¹⁰⁴ It was crucial that while doing their tasks the men from the two formations did not mix (συμμίγνυμι) and maintained their tactical separateness. So, the value of this war cry, shouted by the second line, was purely psychological, since the second line did not otherwise participate in the combat. Interestingly, in both analyzed cases, substitutes are used instead of the word *nobiscum*, which the author of *Strategikon* normally employs to refer to a battle cry. In the first instance it is

101 *Naumachiai*, 9. 29.

102 *Strat.* 3. 15. 13–18.

103 *Strat.* 8B. 46.

104 *Strat.* 7B. 4. The existence of the second line was hidden from the enemy until the clash had begun. A simple method was used – soldiers from both formations marched together, and immediately prior to the fight the men of the second line slowed their pace and emerged as a separate tactical formation.

“φωνὰς βρυχμῶ”,¹⁰⁵ which might indicate that this was simply an unintelligible scream, without any specific message. In the latter case, the author uses the word μεγαλόφωνος – “resounding” and ἀλαλαγμός, which simply means a loud shout. This might mean that the Romans made use of a single official battle cry, closely tied to religion – the *nobiscum*; but at the same time, during combat soldiers could encourage themselves with regular screaming, which did not need to have any meaning or previously agreed form.¹⁰⁶

In any case, the shout mentioned in the passage was to remind the engaged Roman soldiers that the rear of their formation was secured by the second line of troops, which was comforting. And it was also a discouraging reminder to the enemy that even if they defeat the *cursores*, they still needed to deal with the second rank of soldiers (*defensores*), who were battle-ready and had good morale. The shout itself had to be loud and powerful, raised with conviction, in order to smite (καταπλήξ)¹⁰⁷ the enemy.

In this specific instance, the war cry of the second line did not interfere with the tactical order of battle; the fight was already happening, and the second rank was not supposed to join in. Although, the author was still afraid of the two ranks mixing together, which means there was a risk that some of the bolder soldiers would be carried forward into battle by the shouting. However, following the advice given in *Strategikon* eliminated most of the disadvantages of a war cry as used by the barbarians, and used only its positive aspects on the battlefield.¹⁰⁸

Thanks to the author of *Strategikon* we also know what the *nobiscum* shouted before combat sounded like. From a passage devoted to training infantry units we learn that after adopting the *fulcum* formation, the following should be done:

You should train close quarters combat, sometimes with mock, wooden weapons, other times with drawn swords. One of the men should call out “Aid us!”, and the rest should reply in unison “God!”.¹⁰⁹

105 βρυχάομαι is a verb describing a roar, an animal's call, sometimes also a dying man's cry, see: βεβρυχῶς κόνιος δεδραγμένος αίματοέσσης. *Iliad*, 13. 393.

106 Similarly to the *barritus* described by Vegetius.

107 Also surprise, or stun with shock. See: ἀλλ' ἔστῃ γάρ ὑπὸ τῶν τούτου ἀμαρτημάτων ἤδη καταπλήγες διὰ τὸ πολλάκις ἰδεῖν καὶ ἀκοῦσαι *Lysias, Contra Andocides*, 6. 60.

108 This was the case for the Roman military doctrine, which assumed the existence of a tactical order. In barbarian warfare all aspects of a battle cry would be seen as positive.

109 *Strat.* 12B. 24. 14–17.

Obviously, all the aforementioned elements of raising a battle cry, i.e. an attempt to intimidate the enemy, an attempt to block out fear, or an attempt to improve the morale of your own troops were also present in this case. During training a soldier was to intone (κράζω) the first part of the battle cry and the rest replied. It is also worth noting the religious component of this call, written in Latin font – *adiuta Deus*.¹¹⁰ When going into combat, or even during military training, soldiers were reminded that God is on their side, and the army is under His protection.¹¹¹

A similar procedure was followed when the army marched out of the camp before a battle, which had a tremendous impact on morale:

Instead of war cries, prayers should be spoken in the camp on the day of the battle before anyone passes the gates. Everybody, following the priest, the strategos and the archons, should recite in a single voice “Kyrie eleison”. Then, expecting victory, each *meros* should take up the call “Nobiscum Deus” three times and march out of the camp.¹¹²

The above passage not only confirms the practice of joint prayer¹¹³ (εὐχή) on the day of battle,¹¹⁴ but indirectly also the origin of the battle cry – *nobiscum*. The author of *Strategikon* clearly states that before heading out each *meros*¹¹⁵ should cry out *Nobiscum Deus* thrice. This would once again indicate that in the Roman army of the period in question there were actually two types of war

110 The use of this war cry by the Roman army is confirmed in narrative sources, including the legend of Alexander the Great written in the first half of the 7th century, where the author clearly refers to the reign of Emperor Heraclius. See more in: Gerrit J. Reinink, “Heraclius, the New Alexander. Apocalyptic Prophecies During the Reign of Heraclius,” in *The Reign of Heraclius (610–641): Crisis and Confrontation*, ed. Gerrit J. Reinink and Bernard H. Stolte (London – New York: Routledge, 2002), 81–94, particularly p. 81.

111 The subject of religiousness and morality as seen through the eyes of Procopius was discussed in: Whately, *Battles and Generals*, 101–105.

112 Strat. 12B. 16. 93–98.

113 Joint prayer before battle also had psychological significance. The commander, his *archons* and the whole army were commending themselves to God, asking for favor and protection. This improved morale and their sense of belonging to a community. For more on the issue of religion in the army, see: Karapli, *Κατευδῶσις στρατού*; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World*, 24.

114 Studies on soldiers' behaviour confirm that before fighting, in practically every historical epoch, soldiers addressed a deity. It was a way of coping with the fear of death, also fuelled by commanders. See Berkovich, “Fear, Honour and Emotional Control,” 103–104.

115 This was a tactical unit used on the battlefield. The Roman army usually consisted of three *meroi*. Agostino Pertusi, *Odinamenti militari, guerre in occidente e teorie di Guerra dei bizantini (secc. VI–X)* (Spoleto: Presso la sede del Centro, 1968), 671–672.

cries. The first would have been *nobiscum*, which had a specific purpose and was used when the army was still in the military camp (from the Latin noun *fossa*),¹¹⁶ before deployment to the field. *Nobiscum* also carried a religious undertone, which was to improve the morale of troopers by reminding them that God was in their side. On the other hand, you had regular battle cries, here ideally expressed by the term βρυχάομαι, the meaning of which captures the inhuman character of these calls. They lacked any substance and were nothing more than a scream which the soldiers employed to encourage themselves or scare the enemy.

A battle cry also increased unit cohesion and made it possible to identify people in combat, while at the same time it had an impact on the defenders, especially if they were inexperienced fighters or, more so, civilians. During the taking of Seleucia by Roman forces, which came to the aid of Chosroes who was facing a rebellion, the officer in charge, i.e. Mebodes employed a battle cry in the following manner:

On the second day Mebodes, having heard that Seleucia was undefended, approached it at night and ordered the Romans to raise a battle cry in their native tongue, to only use their own language to communicate and to kill anyone in their path without exception. The residents of Seleucia, paralyzed by terror, promptly surrendered the city to Mebodes. This resulted in panic that also affected Ctesiphon, and news about a large Roman army taking Seleucia reached the barbarians living in the nearby city. Filled with fear, they called a general assembly, at which it was jointly agreed to hand over the overseer of the royal treasury to the Romans.¹¹⁷

In this instance, the war cry (ἀλαλάζω)¹¹⁸ broke through the illusory peace of the night, and the fact that it was shouted in a foreign language only intensified the terror of the civilians and the few defenders. As a result of the widespread panic that occurred, not only Seleucia surrendered to the Romans, but also the nearby city of Ctesiphon, whose residents received news about the events of that night. So, the Romans used the psychological effect of the battle cry, magnifying the fear of civilians to further their own agenda.

116 Military terrain surrounded by a moat.

117 Sym. 5. 6. 6–9.

118 Instead of the noun *nobiscum*, which was part of military jargon, Theophylact used the classic Greek verb ἀλαλάζω – “to raise a battle cry,” which is derived from the noun ἀλαλή that referred to the Athenian battle cry (at the same time mimicking its sound).

4 Hush ...

If the Roman army was not supposed to attack to the sound of a war cry, what was the advisable behavior when facing the enemy and moving into close combat? As the title of this chapter suggests, silence was an important factor, and Romans could use it in manner akin to a battle cry, inspiring fear in their enemies and strengthening the fighting spirit of their own men. It is hard to imagine a stoical line of soldiers proceeding forward, maintaining ideal tactical discipline and complete silence. Regardless, it must have created a tremendous impression; other examples of this procedure come from the modern era.¹¹⁹ In the case of silence, we can refer to two theoretical sources that mention maintaining silence before the clash. Vegetius wrote about it in few words only,¹²⁰ whereas the author of *Strategikon* included an extensive description of what actions should be taken to replace the battle cry and at the same time improve the morale of your soldiers in combat:

Once the army has left the camp in order to form ranks before the battle, it should operate in utter silence and no unnecessary words should be spoken. This way, the army is more orderly and the instructions from leading officers are heard better. The presence of the enemy and the necessity to move into close combat is enough to summon the fighting spirit in your men and no additional calls are necessary. But once they are already engaged, it is not a bad idea for soldiers to shout war cries and words of encouragement, especially from the rear ranks, which may lower enemy morale and raise the spirits of our own men.¹²¹

Silence (ἡσυχία) was to guarantee that tactical discipline would be maintained, which was immensely more important on the battlefield than brute strength. The author of *Strategikon* once again emphasized that a battle cry can have disastrous consequences, which is why it is better for the army to approach the enemy in complete silence.¹²² This concern for maintaining formation is proof of the importance of tactics in Late Antiquity. What is more, the author quite reasonably states that keeping quiet allows the soldiers to better hear

119 While this is a distant and imperfect analogy, the description of marching infantrymen in the 18th century is noteworthy. See Berkovich, "Fear, Honour and Emotional Control," 94–95.

120 Veg. 3. 18.

121 Strat. 2. 18. 18–25.

122 This advice was repeated in the chapter devoted to infantry operations. Strat. 12B. 24.

the orders¹²³ that were given verbally.¹²⁴ Also, he again suggests using battle cries only once combat has already begun. This time, the verb that is used is ἀλαλάζω, which means “to shout war cries”, so this likely refers to regular loud shouting, not the *nobiscum*.¹²⁵ Silence, on the other hand, had other effects, including a crucial psychological impact.

We can easily imagine how the sight of a trained Roman formation approaching in close ranks with not a sound being uttered could frighten the enemy just as much as a battle cry. Barbarians, who shouted their calls of encouragement in battle, demonstrated and emphasized their individual skills, which was a prominent aspect of their tribal warfare system, especially for the elites, as their status was at least partially determined by brute strength and their ability to lead armies in battle.¹²⁶ The Romans did the same thing as the barbarians, but emphasizing the unique features of their professional army, which could inspire fear in the irregular force that stood against them. The disciplined ranks approaching in complete silence were testament to the tactical superiority, level of training and fearlessness of the Roman army. This could affect the enemy’s morale just as much as the loudest war cry. Additionally, the Romans were perfectly aware of this psychological effect and made every effort to maximize its potency. Once again delving into the invaluable *Strategikon* we find a suitable passage, where the author describes the maneuvers of Roman cavalry in the presence of the enemy:

If silence is maintained within the ranks, young soldiers and horses will be less anxious, the army will seem all the more terrifying to the enemy and orders will be heard better. For this reason, once the army begins to advance, making any additional sounds is inappropriate.¹²⁷

Furthermore, when talking about infantry soldiers who failed to observe the ban on conversations while the army was advancing:

123 Here a “grecized” form of the Latin noun *mandatum* – another proof that Latin was still a living language in the Roman army of the end of the 6th century.

124 Since orders could also be given by way of musical instruments and flags.

125 The verb was already discussed when analyzing a fragment from Theophylact Simocatta’s *Historiae*.

126 On the subject see, e.g.: Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe*, 45–47 and 57–60.

127 Strat. 2. 17. 9–13.

Soldiers positioned at the rear of each unit should be instructed that if they hear even a whisper from any of their subordinates, they are to smack them with the spear shaft ...¹²⁸

Maintaining silence within the ranks while moving to engage the enemy had several advantages, including inspiring fear. First of all, as we have already discussed, soldiers did not allow themselves to be governed by their emotions (which shouting war cries encouraged and often led to). Secondly, they could better hear the orders given by superiors and act on them quicker. And finally – silence in the formation was to mentally affect your own soldiers and the enemy's.¹²⁹ A battle cry spurred the brave on to fight, but at the same time stopped the cowardly in their tracks,¹³⁰ which is why using it in an army that operated based on tactical schemata was harmful, as it could scatter the cohesive attacking formation into three separate groups. Breaking formation immediately prior to engaging the enemy, especially if it was an infantry *fulcum*,¹³¹ negated practically all the strengths of Roman tactics. To counter that, silence was intended to have a calming effect on own soldiers and horses (*άλογο*),¹³² particularly younger (*νεώτερος*), less experienced ones. By remaining silent, the impact of negative stress factors was not compounded. When forming the already mentioned *fulcum*, the army was unable to approach the enemy lines at a fast pace; soldiers rather had to tread carefully, step by step, minding the

128 Strat. 12B. 17. 40–43.

129 In the 18th century there were practically identical rules and orders of punishing soldiers breaking silence in a line. Notably, in both cases, tactics and discipline were of paramount importance. Berkovich, “Fear, Honour and Emotional Control,” 96.

130 Strat. 2. 18.

131 The use of this formation and its barbarian origins were studied in: Rance, “The Fulcum,” 265–326.

132 It is surprising to see the noun *άλογο* being used instead of the classic *ἵππος* that appears previously in *Strategikon*. The author of the treatise uses the noun *άλογο* quite frequently in the descriptive part: See: Strat. I 6, 32; II 1, 9; 17, 11; V 1, 16. 17; 3, 6.10; 4, 13; VII 11. 20; A 7, 1.5; 13, 1. 7. 11; B 7, 2. 11; 10, 15. 23; 11, 47. 49; 12, 8; IX 4, 42; X 1, 17. 26; 2, 31; XI 2, 31. 67. 83. 107; 4, 17. 86. 114. 117; XII B 22, 80. 91. The classic word for “horse” – *ἵππος*, appears mostly in those parts of the work that we might assume to have been compiled. However, sections that stand out from among these are Book I: I 1, 11. 12. 13. 20. 21; 2, 24. 35. 36. 88. 94; 9, 27. 57 and Book II: II 6, 8; 8, 6; 9, 8. 20. 22. 26; 18, 9, which are clearly utilitarian (describing Roman cavalry formed similarly to Avar mounted units). And the noun *ἵππος* appears separately in military maxims, which were from an earlier period and were simply collected by the author of *Strategikon*, see: Strat. 8A, 95; 8B, 254. The word is completely absent from Book V, where only *άλογο* is used – but Book V is entirely devoted to baggage trains. It is possible that a more in-depth analysis of how the two nouns were used would lead to more insightful conclusions about how the contents of *Strategikon* were compiled by its author (or authors!).

place of their comrades in the formation and the positioning of their shield in relation to the shields of those on either side of them. The complicated formation demanded soldiers in it to be highly focused.¹³³ The silence that was maintained, or even safeguarded (*φυλάσσω*)¹³⁴ within the ranks, improved the chances that the Romans would reach the enemy in good order, which in turn increased their chances of winning the ensuing fight.

Keeping silent also affected recruits and less experienced fighters. Until combat was joined, soldiers still unused to their craft were to march in good order, without a word being spoken. This would encourage even the faint of heart to march ahead, despite their fear of the inevitable clash and the possibility of death or injury. Once again the author of the treatise mentions horses, who apparently mirrored the emotions experienced by their riders.¹³⁵ A horse placed in a stressful situation would become stressed itself and could bolt, thus disrupting the Roman formation. These observations are confirmed by a contemporary animal behaviorist.¹³⁶ Marching in silence was to have a soothing effect on the men as well as their mounts, and at least partially ease the anxiety before the clash, while at the same time helping to maintain tactical discipline. Whereas the opposing force, seeing an army approaching in utter silence and perfect formation, must have felt afraid, which was also mentioned by the author of *Strategikon*.¹³⁷ In this context it should come as no surprise that anyone failing to keep silent would be strictly punished by a blow from a spear shaft (here *κοντάριον* instead of *κοντός*).¹³⁸ In order to affect the enemy on a mental level, discipline had to be followed to the tiniest detail, which is why talkers would be hit to remind them of their duty. Confusion in an army that

133 *Fulcum* was a defensive formation that was assumed in order to receive an enemy charge, but that does not mean that it was static. Rance, "The Fulcum," 265–326.

134 The use of the verb *φυλάσσω* in this context was deliberate and made the commander responsible for maintaining silence within the ranks. See, e.g. *Iliad*, 10. 312.

135 *Strat.* 2. 17.

136 See more about the animal behavior expert: Aleksander Böldyrew, *Equus Polonus. Koń w wojsku polskim w XVI wieku* (Piotrków Trybunalski: Stara Szuflada, 2016), 58–60.

137 *Strat.* 2. 17.

138 Interestingly, the noun *κοντός* is mostly used in descriptions of infantry operations. See: *Strat.* III 1, 10. 11; 5, 32. 49 (here, as an exception, with reference to cavalry); XI 3, 10; XII B 1, 2.9; 17, 31; 20, 8. Whereas *κοντάριον* is basically used throughout the treatise without distinction into infantry and cavalry, see: *Strat.* I 1, 10. 16; 2, 18. 31. 55; II 10, 2; IV 3, 42; VIIB 15, 17; 16, 5; 17, 14. 15. 16; XI 1, 45; 2, 24. 26; 3, 10; XIIA 7, 53. 58; XIIB 3, 2; 4, 3; II, 13; 16, 45. 47. 51; 17, 42; 20, 8; 24, 8. Any issues related to weapon study are further compounded by the existence of the variation *κοντάριον*, which is present in medieval Greek, but appears only sporadically in the treatise: *Strat.* I 1, 17; III 14, 10. Although in all instances the item in question is a spear, we should bear in mind that the author of the treatise mostly used the term *κοντός* to refer to infantry spears.

assaults the enemy in silence can lead to various extreme situations; a good example is the retreat of the Roman army in 587 during a night engagement with the Avars, when a small problem with one of the pack animals caused widespread confusion. The beast's baggage straps were loose. Some soldiers called out to its owner to turn around, but the repeated phrase "torna, torna" sparked panic among the entire army.¹³⁹ Undoubtedly the fact that this was happening at night was one of the reasons why panic could be caused by such a mundane factor.¹⁴⁰ It is also worth looking at one of the few detailed descriptions of the Romans attacking in silence. The events described happened when fighting against Persian rebels led by Baram, during a Roman intervention to support the young Chosroes in 591:

At the third hour of dawn, Baram's men, hungry for battle, launched an attack, screaming and making a noise, whereas the Roman army moved to engage in order, calmly and without shouting. Strategos Narses was furious at strategoi Bindoes and Sarames for failing to keep order among the barbarian forces. So the Romans imposed their own order on their barbarian allies, convincing them to stop their mindless screams and act with tactical cohesion.¹⁴¹

The above example clearly illustrates Roman army doctrine, which is further confirmed by what happened later in the battle, when the Romans refused to carry out a chaotic assault on a hill and maintained formation. In Theophylact's description, the dominant theme is the juxtaposition between order and discipline, represented by the silence in Roman ranks, and the chaos embodied by the barbarians. This demonstrates to what extent silence in the ranks was considered superior to war cries. *Strategos* Narses all but forced his Persian allies to follow Roman principles in this regard. A similar example of maintaining discipline and silence comes from 1068, from a battle with the emir of Aleppo. The Roman army was surrounded by shrieking Arabs, previously successful in battle with the Romans, forcing the imperial forces to spend the night in

139 See extensive literature on the subject in: Năsturel, "Torna, torna, fratre," 179–188; Baldwin, "Torna, torna, phrater," 264–268 and more general remarks: Michael Whitby, "Theophylact's Knowledge of Languages," *Byzantion* 52 (1982): 425–428.

140 Night panic is discussed in the section dedicated to night attacks on camps. Interestingly, Nikephoros Ouranos recommended keeping the animals outside the camp because, frightened by enemy attack, they could cause general panic. This shows that at night animals were unpredictable. Then again, at night it is easier to cause panic in humans as well. Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, 62. 5.

141 Sym. 5. 9. 6–7.

a besieged camp. Romanos Diogenes calmly devised a battle plan and in the morning the Roman army left the camp in total silence, maintaining full tactical discipline. Attaleiates described the situation and noted the huge contrast between both armies. When the distance between the troops shrank, Romans let out their battle cries and attacked the enemy violently, forcing them to retreat.¹⁴² It was a perfect execution of the maneuvers suggested in military treatises, in line with the recommendations of the author of *Strategikon* for raising battle cries.¹⁴³

In Late Antiquity, the Romans avoided raising battle cries in the initial stages of an engagement, choosing rather to remain silent. But they did not completely ban shouting. In later stages of the battle, once the enemy had been engaged and the chances of disrupting tactical order decreased, soldiers were to employ war cries to raise morale and terrify the enemy. These cries had to be powerful, so that the opposing side would actually get scared of the Romans' strength and confidence. All suggestions related to battle cries clearly indicate two things. First, the authors of Antiquity were well aware of their pros and cons, and how they could directly impact the soldiers' mental state and the tactical situation; and second, it was believed that during an assault battle cries would do more harm than good. Silence in the ranks, although admittedly not as spectacular as shouting, yielded similar results, strengthening the morale of Roman soldiers, or at least not lowering it in those of weaker spirit, afraid to confront the enemy. So, when approaching the enemy, the army inspired fear with its order and discipline, and when close combat began, then soldiers made use of shouting, since at that stage of the clash the inherent disadvantages of a battle cry would no longer be so destructive. Thus, the battle cry was made to fit into the framework of Roman warfare after the tactical changes of the 4th century and could serve to both cause fear among enemy ranks as well as aid Roman soldiers overcome their own.

5 Charge

Another topic that we should analyze here is the psychological impact of a cavalry charge.¹⁴⁴ Its effects may seem obvious today, especially when considering

142 Attaleiates, 113–114.

143 McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 356–357.

144 Interestingly, the primary sources used here, i.e. the works of Vegetius, Syrianus and *Strategikon*, focus on the psychological aspect of cavalry actions. In the 10th century, the treatises were much less centered on the psychological effects of mounted attacks and more on the correct distribution of heavy cavalry on the battlefield. This may stem from

accounts of medieval battles or descriptions from modern military diaries,¹⁴⁵ but for any young Roman commander who had only just begun to learn their craft, this knowledge would not necessarily come naturally. A mounted assault had a devastating psychological effect on any opponent, particularly if cavalry attacked from the front in a wide formation and against infantry. It is difficult to imagine what was going through the head of a spearman about to receive a heavy cavalry charge. Throughout history it was often the case that the mere sight and thunderous noise was enough to make terrified infantrymen flee.¹⁴⁶ In such situations, all it took was for a single soldier to lose his nerve looking at the approaching mounts and their armed riders. If that happened, a whole army could become governed by conformity – which would result in a disorderly flight from the cavalry.¹⁴⁷ As seems to be suggested by the authors of Antiquity, this result was intended, and the commander was supposed to intensify the effect.¹⁴⁸ This non-military aspect of a mounted assault was especially highlighted by Syrianus Magister, who stated the following:

Cavalry differs from an infantry phalanx. The latter is formed in tight ranks, which gives it great power, since each soldier pushes the one before him onwards. A mounted phalanx, on the other hand, is different, not as close. Despite this, it possesses its own strength, as it does not move to engage slowly, but rather falls upon the enemy rapidly, at full speed. Such

the fact that deploying cataphracts as an independent unit on the battlefield was a freshly devised solution, and so the authors of the treatises from the Middle Byzantine period devoted more attention to it, due to its complexity and relative newness.

- 145 See the very interesting findings by J.F. Verbruggen, especially Western knights' fear of infantrymen, Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe*, 46–49; and the battle psychology of foot soldiers (177–182).
- 146 This fact was deliberately used throughout the ages. One example, less obvious than the doctrine of using heavy cavalry in the Middle Ages, could be the British guidelines on using mounted units from the beginning of the 20th century. See: Stephen Badsey, *Doctrine and Reform in the British Cavalry 1880–1918* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 19–21, where the author quotes the defenders' reactions to a cavalry charge; even in this period of firearms, they would drop their weapons at the sight of a frontal mounted assault. That is simply the psychological impact of cavalry.
- 147 The outcome of such flight would always be the same. Infantry could protect themselves against cavalry only if they kept tactical order and remained in a cohesive formation. But humans do not act rationally under extreme circumstances, detaching themselves from what is happening. This results in illogical behavior, often leading to danger or death. Freedy Kilpatrick, "Problems of Perception in Extreme Situations," *Human Organization* 16/2 (1957): 20–22.
- 148 Horses were to be decorated and well-tended and pennants and images of dragons were flown above the unit, with dragon tails streaming behind once the horses gathered speed.

a charge is brutal and terrifying to any soldier who does not have years of military training under his belt.¹⁴⁹

Syrianus confirms that one of the effects of a cavalry charge was inspiring terror (here *καταπληκτικός*)¹⁵⁰ among enemy ranks, and in an ideal situation forcing the infantrymen, especially those without experience (here as *πεπειραμένος*),¹⁵¹ to flee even before the clash. This effect could likely be reinforced by the equipment used by Roman mounted units, which has already been described in the section devoted to arms and armor. In the case of cavalry, we can also imagine that charging, similarly to a battle cry, could prompt soldiers to attack without regard for tactical plans or unit cohesion. This would also affect horses, who have their own characters and, just like humans, adopt the emotions of those around them.¹⁵² As was mentioned before, tactical schemata were of crucial importance to the Romans, and so was maintaining order on the battlefield. It was equally important in the Middle Byzantine period when the main assault force was a unit of heavy cavalry (*cataphracts*), supported on the flanks by two units of lighter cavalry. The *cataphracts* attacked the enemy in a composed manner, not charging but maintaining tactical discipline.¹⁵³ In the cavalry regulations included in *Strategikon* we find the following provision to prevent breaking ranks:

During combat, pursuit or when positioned in the first line, do not charge too far ahead, for you may disrupt the formation.¹⁵⁴

An attack by a mounted unit used the physical impact of the charge, but also it was intended to force the enemy to flee. Once both sides had actually engaged in combat, the psychological impact ceased to be as important; tactics and training became the deciding factors. Consequently, the initial impact had to be both spectacular, to terrify the enemy (to this end it could be combined

149 Syrianus, 17. 20–27.

150 Translated as terrifying, shocking, scary, see e.g.: *μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα χρῆσάμενος ἐνεργούς ἄμα καὶ καταπληκτικαῖς προσβολαῖς ταχέως ἐκράτησε τῆς πόλεως*. Polybius, *Historie* 3.13.6. With a very similar meaning, see: *Strat.* 2. 18. 24.

151 Notably, the word is never used in *Strategikon*.

152 To counter that, Syrianus suggested that the first rank, which was most susceptible to breaking formation, should be made up of horses of sufficient combat experience and age (it was inadvisable to use too young horses in the initial line, as they were more likely to be affected by their riders' enthusiasm). Syrianus, 17.

153 See Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, 57. 13 where the author also mentions the courage of the *cataphracts*. Cf. also *Praecepta militaria*, 4. 3–5; 11–14.

154 *Strat.* 3. 5. 3–9.

with a battle cry used at the correct moment), but also orderly, in case the opponents stood their ground and received the charge. In any case, a cavalry assault was intended to cause a psychological effect that would give advantage to the attackers and, ideally, make the enemy retreat without a fight. In the Middle Byzantine period, a formation of cataphracts (*κατάφρακτοι*) had this psychological impact on the enemy,¹⁵⁵ both their commander, as well as the soldiers surrounding him. These heavily-armed warriors had to be deployed opposite the enemy commander,¹⁵⁶ ultimately forcing him to flee or shift the command position (and such sudden change in the location of the commander's banner could put an army to flight), otherwise risking his life in a clash with the cataphracts.¹⁵⁷ A heavy cavalry attack on infantry, even if it was not a charge, must have been an awe-inspiring sight. Nikephoros Ouranos noted that the opponent often fled without a fight.¹⁵⁸ Even if the infantry remained on the battlefield until the moment of attack, the armor of the cataphracts would give them a huge advantage over the infantrymen, which would further affect the enemy's morale making the foot soldiers even more likely to retreat.

6 Envoys and Spies

Professional scouting units were not the only ones who gathered intelligence. A Roman commander was supposed to use every opportunity to disrupt enemy plans or find out more about them.¹⁵⁹ Often these two were tied together, and in fact in Late Antiquity, judging by the comments found in military treatises, they were part of a grand game encompassing civilians, envoys and deserters.

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- 155 For an earlier period, see Berthold Rubin, "Die Entstehung der Kataphraktenreiterei im Lichte der chorezmischen Ausgrabungen," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 4/2/3 (1955): 264–283; Mielczarek, *Cataphracti and Clibanari*. For the Middle Byzantine period: David Soria Molina, "Cataphracti y clibanarii (y III). La caballería pesada del ejército romano-bizantino, de Justiniano a Alejo Comneno," *Aquila Legionis* 16 (2013): 75–123; McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 211–216; 280–328; Decker, *The Byzantine art of War*, 152–158; Theotokis, *Byzantine Military Tactics*, 194–195; 206–209; 229–231; McGeer, "Infantry versus Cavalry" 135–145.
- 156 The effectiveness of this procedure was presented by Morillo, "Expecting Cowardice: Medieval Battle Tactics Reconsidered," 71.
- 157 Using Stephen Morillo's terminology, when using this tactic Romans would expect cowardice from the enemy commander, which would be quite effectively fueled by purposefully placing heavy cavalry opposite his command post.
- 158 Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, 57. 13.
- 159 An interesting summary of this issue was provided in: Kiril Marinow, "Разузнавачи, шпиони, предатели. Значение на разузнаването при действията на византийските войски в планинска местност (VI–XI в.)," *Bulgaria Mediaevalis* 7 (2016): 351–371.

Anything was acceptable in order to prepare for an engagement or strike at the enemy's morale without involving your main forces or risking the lives of your soldiers.

One group that was frequently used for gathering intelligence were the envoys who negotiated conditions of peace, armistice or prisoner exchange. Both sides exploited the privileged status of envoys and their physical immunity in order to learn more about the opposing army or its intentions. Immunity was not always respected; for example, Comentiolus was tortured by the Avar khagan.¹⁶⁰ The Romans likewise did not always follow the established custom of receiving envoys, e.g. the Avar diplomat Targitios was once sentenced to exile (and six months of hard labor) to the island of Chalcis.¹⁶¹ Emperor Maurice, when announcing this sentence, was supposedly so agitated that he initially demanded the Avar's head. Maurice's behavior was caused by the Avars breaking a truce after having received a large tribute, and Targitios himself was not to blame, so the penalty that he received was simply a way for the emperor to release some of his anger.

An envoy was usually taken into the camp of the army, with whose leader they were supposed to negotiate, which was an excellent opportunity for first-hand observation. Roman envoys could assess the overall condition of the enemy army, its size, equipment and morale. On the other hand, the side that received the diplomats knew that it may simply be a convenient pretext for gathering intelligence.¹⁶² This is when the true battle of wits began between the two forces. The envoys attempted to uncover the actual state of the opposing army, whereas its commander tried their best to obscure reality in order to lull the enemy into a false sense of security or to simply scare them. Various

160 Sym. 1. 6.

161 Sym. 1. 8. 9–10.

162 This was practiced not only by the Romans, but also their opponents. See an analysis of a fragment of Kekaumenos' *Strategikon* by Georgios Theotokis: Theotokis, *Byzantine Military Tactics*, 160–161. See also a text dedicated to diplomatic relations between Romans and Arabs in the 10th century: Alexander Beihammer, "Strategy of Diplomacy and Ambassadors in Byzantine-Muslim Relations in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," in *Ambassadeurs et ambassades au cœur des relations diplomatiques Rome – Occident Médiéval – Byzance (VIII^e s. avant J.-C. – XII^e s. après J.-C.)*, ed. Audrey Becker and Nicolas Drocourt (Nancy-Metz: Presses Universitaires de Lorraine, 2012), 371–400, about obtaining information by diplomats: pp. 383–384. On diplomacy itself see also Nike Koutrakou, "Logos and Pathos. Between Peace and War: Rhetoric as a Tool of Diplomacy in the Middle Byzantine Period," *Thesaurismata* 25 (1995): 7–20; Evangelos Chrysos, "Byzantine Diplomacy, A.D. 300–800: Means and End," in *Byzantine diplomacy: papers of the Twenty-fourth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Jonathan Shepard and Simon Franklin (London: Aldershot, 1992), 25–39.

tricks and stratagems were used to this effect. A similar game was played in the 10th century on the Roman-Arab border. A *thémata strategos* was supposed to befriend his Arab counterpart across the border, winning his trust with gifts and letters delivered by messengers.¹⁶³ As a result, the commander gained access to the enemy's operations and, with a little bit of luck, could obtain valuable information about the number of enemy soldiers, their equipment and training. However, the Arabs soon saw through this ruse and, to counter it, could mislead the messengers.

Psychological warfare aimed at lowering enemy morale was also waged by diplomatic means. As stated above, diplomats had access to enemy camps, meaning that they could relatively freely observe the enemy's soldiers. Thus, emissaries became the eyes of the *strategos* and could bring back useful information. Sometimes, together with the diplomats, professional soldiers would be sent, who could then, under the guise of assisting in the diplomatic mission, conduct a reconnaissance.¹⁶⁴ Whereas enemy diplomats became targets of Roman military stratagems. By influencing the envoys, Roman commanders tried to manipulate their opponents, usually spreading chaos and misinformation.¹⁶⁵ This is what was advisable during a diplomatic visit:

When you are to receive enemy envoys, learn as much as you can about the leaders of the group and on their arrival treat them with exceptional friendliness and hospitality; this way, their own men will begin suspecting them [of treason].¹⁶⁶

With this devious stratagem the Romans affected the morale of the whole enemy army,¹⁶⁷ particularly its leaders. Diplomats were usually selected from among people of high social standing, in the case of the barbarians – members of the commander's inner circle.¹⁶⁸ If a Roman *strategos* played his

163 *De velitatione bellica*, 7. 14–21.

164 Frontinus, 1. 1. 3. Various simple tricks were additionally used to look around the whole camp, e.g. searching all over the place for a horse that supposedly had escaped the Roman diplomats. Frontinus, 1. 2. 1.

165 See, e.g.: Frontinus, 1. 8. 1; 2.

166 Strat. 8A. 17.

167 Metellus was once able to bribe envoys from Jugurtha, whose treason was then discovered by their ruler. The king punished the envoys brutally, causing chaos among his entourage and depriving himself of potential allies. Frontinus, 1. 8. 8.

168 See more in: Guy Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West 450–900* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 20–40.

cards correctly with the envoys, he could achieve quite a lot.¹⁶⁹ The diplomats returning to their lines had to report to the army commander about what happened and what was agreed upon during negotiations. On mentioning the enormous hospitality with which the Romans had treated the head of the diplomatic party – they planted the seed of uncertainty. From that moment on, even subconsciously, the enemy commander would suspect one of his trusted aides of treason (literally “look with suspicion” – ὑποπτως).¹⁷⁰ This could be advantageous to the Romans, causing confusion in the enemy army, or even sparking a power struggle. The same method was used on the strategic level against Rome’s barbarian neighbors, in particular the Slavs,¹⁷¹ and before that the Goths.¹⁷² The Roman army would only attack the lands of specific Slav chieftains,¹⁷³ located at a certain distance from the limes. This way, those attacked began suspecting their neighbors living closer to the border of being in league with the Romans. This compounded the political chaos along the Danube and resulted in civil wars, at the same time moving the danger further away from Roman territories. Another interesting tip on presents comes from the 10th century. Preparing for a campaign, the emperor took with him a large amount of the best quality clothes and shoes, which could be later used as gifts for important enemy captives or for distinguished and powerful foreigners.¹⁷⁴ The same treatise includes information that an emperor should take with him objects made of pure gold to use during meals with foreigners.¹⁷⁵ It was clearly a trick intended to charm and, ideally, bribe a captive or an ambassador.

The author of *Sylloge Tacticorum* stressed that diplomats representing either side could be effectively employed in psychological warfare. He mentioned commanders who first cajoled enemy envoys with kind words and

169 This is what Hieron did before receiving ransom for his prisoners (he feasted with them and treated them with hospitality). As a result, any prisoners returning from his captivity were approached with suspicion by their countrymen. Polyaeus, 1. 29.

170 Spartans would deliberately ask for high-ranking envoys when sitting down to peace talks. By employing the stratagems described in this section, they were able to sow doubts about the integrity of prominent enemy politicians. Polyaeus, 2. 1. 33.

171 Strat. II. 4.

172 The subject of burning fields and environmental warfare in the Byzantine world was recently analyzed, beginning the narrative with *Strategikon*, in: Sofia Germanidu, “Μία Μορφή «Περιβαλλοντικού» Πολέμου στο Βυζάντιο: Γεωργικές Δολιοφθορές και Αγροτικά Εργαλεία ως Φονικά Οπλα,” *Byzantina Symmeikta* 27 (2007): 145–172.

173 A similar situation is also referred to in one of the military maxims: Strat. 8A. 20.

174 *Constantini Porphyrogeniti tres tractatus de expeditionibus militaribus imperatoris*, (C) 245–249.

175 *Constantini Porphyrogeniti tres tractatus de expeditionibus militaribus imperatoris*, (C) 275–280.

who, once the enemy force let their guard down as a result, would then attack mercilessly.¹⁷⁶ Other commanders sent their own envoys to the enemy with moderate words, and when the enemy's vigilance was thus weakened, the Romans would launch their assault. The author also recommended using envoys as spies.¹⁷⁷ If they discovered that the enemy camp was not well secured, the *strategos* could attack it at night, making use of the knowledge obtained from the envoys.¹⁷⁸

When receiving an enemy diplomatic party, the Romans were expected to show good manners and behave properly, even if the Roman army was significantly more powerful than the opposing force.¹⁷⁹ By doing so, the Romans did not antagonize the enemy elites. There were, obviously, certain exceptions to this rule, for example attempts to intimidate the envoys by soldiers, or by actions that showed off the strength and confidence of Roman legionnaires.¹⁸⁰ When an enemy stronger than the Romans sent envoys, the author of *Sylloge Tacticorum* recommended (in the spirit of middle Antiquity) concealing any signs of affluence, hiding beautiful women and any objects that might have encouraged the enemy, and to display one's numerous, well-armed and confident soldiers instead.¹⁸¹ What is more, any given word had to be respected, since it was bound by an oath,¹⁸² according to the ancient *fides Romana*.¹⁸³ The author of *Strategikon* warned Roman commanders against going back on their word, emphasizing the importance of the oath they were bound by. Although Romans feared betrayal and breach of agreements, in fact even expecting that from the other side,¹⁸⁴ always suspecting barbarians of planning treachery,¹⁸⁵ the military treatises clearly indicate that they themselves strived to uphold negotiated agreements.

176 *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 1. 15.

177 *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 1. 16. On the other hand, he recommended to be wary of similar procedures on the enemy's part. *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 26. 1.

178 *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 1. 16.

179 Strat. 8A. 33.

180 See, for example, the behavior of Roman soldiers (likely initiated by the *strategos* himself) towards the Persian envoy Mebodes, who was to negotiate the signing of a peace treaty. Sym. 1. 15.

181 *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 26. 2.

182 Strat. 8A. 36. See also: Chrysos, "Byzantine Diplomacy," 25–39.

183 Brian Campbell, "Diplomacy in the Roman world (c.500 BC–AD 235)," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 12/1 (2001): 1–22. An excellent example is a reference by the author of *Sylloge Tacticorum*'s to Marcus Atilius Regulus, who was killed during the First Punic War for upholding Roman honor. *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 26. 3.

184 Strat. 8B. 36.

185 This was especially true of the Avars, who were considered false and deceptive by the Romans. Strat. 11. 2.

7 Deserters and Traitors

In the turbulent times of the Migration Period, Roman leaders often had to face previously unknown problems, like for example refugees, who left their own homes running from war and seeking shelter, but who could at the same time be working for the opposing side, learning the lie of the land and spying on behalf of the barbarians.¹⁸⁶ An even bigger issue was the soldiers' tribal allegiances. A portion of the Roman army was made up of men from barbarian tribes who enlisted wanting to make a career in the military, or to improve their fortunes. Identifying spies in such a multi-ethnic force was extremely difficult.¹⁸⁷ Although the authors of treatises advised strictly against such situations,¹⁸⁸ it did happen that Roman soldiers were sent to fight against their fellow tribes. In that case, they had to decide what was more important to them – their service and military oath, or their familial/tribal allegiance. A frequent result was for the latter option to be picked, and so soldiers ran off to their own, carrying information about the state of the Roman army and its plans. Deserters also included native Romans, either disheartened by their service, afraid for their lives or running for other reasons that to us may sometimes seem completely trivial. Interestingly, sources confirm that even Roman citizens could abandon their colors and defect to the side of the barbarians.¹⁸⁹ Desertions and betrayal were countered by various means, mostly by enforcing the provisions of military law, which were to be unavoidable and strict so that

186 For example, the famous passage from the work of Simocatta where the author mentions two Slavic musicians who were most likely spies. Sym. 6. 2. See also extensive literature on the passage in question: Paul M. Barford, *The Early Slavs. Culture and Society in Early Medieval Eastern Europe* (London: The British Museum Press, 2001), 59–60; Marcin Wołoszyn, *Theophylaktos Simokates und die Slawen am Ende des westlichen Ozeans – die erste Erwähnung der Ostseeslawen?* (Kraków: Instytut Archeologii i Etnologii Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2014), 321–326. Obviously, most authors analyze the fragment focusing on geographic information about early Slav territories and the functioning of the *Veche* in barbarian culture. Jan Prostko-Prostyński, „„Ziemia ich nie zna żelaza”. Glosa do Historiae VI.2 Teofylakta Simokatty,” in *Viator per devia scientiae itinera*, ed. Andrzej Michałowski, Milena Teska and Marek Żółkiewski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2015), 321–326.

187 The author of an anonymous treatise on tactics from the end of the 10th or the beginning of the 11th century suggested to camp soldiers in units and to not mix units with each other under any circumstances. This way, men from each encampment would know one another and be able to easily detect an enemy spy. *Byzantini liber De Re Militari*, 2.

188 Strat. 7. 6.

189 Strat. 11. 4. Noting that soldiers who did not return from Slav captivity after the usual period and joined the barbarians should receive harsh punishment.

soldiers would not risk running off.¹⁹⁰ The authors of *Digesta*¹⁹¹ proposed that military fugitives face truly harsh consequences:

Traitors and deserters are usually tortured and sentenced to death, but are first discharged from service, deemed to be enemies and not soldiers.¹⁹²

An even more severe punishment was postulated by Syrianus in his treatise on naval combat. If a sailor betrayed the Romans during an expedition into enemy territory, repercussions would reach his whole family. His wife and children, and even parents were to be exiled from home and left without any means to live.¹⁹³ The author concluded this to be an effective means of motivation, since everyone cares about their loved ones and puts their welfare above their own. The provisions of military law included in military treatises were equally unforgiving:

If anyone should give in to the temptation of defecting to the enemy, he shall suffer the strictest of punishments. Punishment will be meted out not only against the culprit, but also anyone who knew about his plans beforehand, since despite that knowledge they had not brought the matter to their archon.¹⁹⁴

Provision seven of Roman military law dealt directly with treason. The penalty was to be as severe as possible, to discourage any soldier from entertaining treasonous thoughts. What is more, Freshfield suggested that the actual punishment meant being thrown to wild animals (βρῶσιν θηρίοις).¹⁹⁵ This is consistent with Roman *damnatio ad bestias* and with *Digesta; Modestinus libro quatro de poenis*:

Whoever deserts to the enemy, and later returns, shall be tortured and sentenced to be thrown to wild beasts or be hanged, even though soldiers normally do not suffer such penalties.¹⁹⁶

190 See: Różycki, *Mauricii Strategicon*, 134–139.

191 We need to remember that provisions included in *Digesta* illustrate a legal reality that was simply postulated by the lawmakers; it does not mean that the laws were followed to the letter.

192 *Digesta*, 49. 16. 7.

193 *Naumachiai*, 9. 16.

194 *Strat.* 1. 6. 7.

195 Freshfield, *Roman law*, 13. *Damnatio ad bestias* also appears in the laws of Ruffus.

196 *Digesta*, 49. 16. 3. 10.

Syrianus also reserved a gruesome fate for traitors and defectors. The death penalty was to be carried out not by sword, but fire. According to the author it was supposed to be punishment not only for betraying one's brothers-in-arms, but also the families and the Christian community of the Empire.¹⁹⁷

This is how things were in theory, at least, but in reality soldiers did run away from the army and commanders had to somehow deal with this issue, especially when deserters carried information that would allow enemies to disrupt Roman plans. Army leaders were not only aware of the problem but could actually use deserters and traitors to further their own gains. Vegetius, although he did not devote a separate section to this issue, neatly sums up his ideas on it in the following passage:

A wise leader tries to sow enmity among his enemies, knowing full well that even the smallest nation will not allow itself to be destroyed if its people are internally united. But one man's jealousy of another rapidly brings about the doom of both and prevents them from noticing external dangers or thinking of defense.¹⁹⁸

One of the methods of causing confusion¹⁹⁹ in enemy ranks was to use deserters and traitors.²⁰⁰ The author of *Strategikon* went so far as to advise that they be sent to the enemy lines with false information.²⁰¹ Leaders of barbarian armies would be willing to believe traitors, deliberately misled by the Romans, since the fugitives would be convinced that they were providing good intelligence. Of course, this stratagem had been known for centuries; deserters were frequently used as involuntary agents. Suffice to say that Clearchus used a false deserter to talk the Greeks into setting up camp in a less favorable location.²⁰² Military treatises stated that Roman soldiers should never know the true plans of their commander.²⁰³ This was a safeguard against possible treason, and a

197 *Naumachiai*, 9. 17.

198 *Veg.* 3. 10.

199 The other side would be doing the exact same thing. In the introduction to Book VI, the author of *Strategikon* stated that most tactical plans that the army trained in before the clash would be known to the enemy thanks to deserters and spies. This is why the army should prepare for a number of tactical variations, which made it difficult for the enemy to figure out what plan the Romans would follow in the coming battle. *Strat.* 5. Introduction.

200 Stratagems related to traitors were also employed at the highest level of command, a case in point could be the behavior of the Carthaginians towards Alexander. *Frontinus*, 1. 2. 3.

201 *Strat.* 8A. 11.

202 *Polyaenus*, 2. 2. 4.

203 *Strat.* 8B. 23.

Roman *strategos* should even himself spread rumors among his men to make them believe that he intends to do something other than actually planned. In the end, any traitors deserting from Roman lines would carry false information to the enemy without even realizing it. Although the army was weakened by the escape, which also affected morale, particularly in the unit that the escapee served in, at least the enemy would be misled by false intelligence. A very similar stratagem was included in Nikephoros Ouranos' *Taktika* where the author recommended the *strategos* to spread gossip about the goal of the campaign and then to actually march in that direction. The army's march was observed by enemy spies who confirmed the goal of the Roman expedition. Yet, when the opportunity arose, the commander changed the direction of marching and attacked where he was not expected.²⁰⁴ As a result, the Romans attacked an unprepared region, possibly even a weakened one, because the enemy had transferred some of their troops to a region which was believed to soon be attacked.

Going even further, the author of *Strategikon* proposed a truly diabolical scheme to be used against traitors that managed to run off and reach enemy lines:

You should send letters to deserters who turned to the other side, so that they will find their way into enemy hands. These should contain information about the previously planned treachery. The enemy will become suspicious of the deserters, which will force them to run once again.²⁰⁵

By doing so, the Romans neutralized the problem of soldiers who switched their allegiance (literally "deserted": *αὐτομολέω*). Upon capturing such a letter (*γράμμα*), the enemy commander had to expect that a conspiracy was in place.²⁰⁶ It also forced them to question the credibility of any information provided by the deserter, who according to the captured correspondence was still serving the Romans, only pretending to switch sides. If the deserter brought any knowledge about the strength of the Roman army, its equipment, plans or movements, it all ceased to matter and what is more – the enemy commander

²⁰⁴ Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, 63. 2.

²⁰⁵ Strat. 8A. 28.

²⁰⁶ A similar solution was used by Hannibal, who after the betrayal of several of his men publicly announced to the army that these were not traitors, but spies dispatched to learn about Roman plans. Hannibal was perfectly aware that among his men there were enemy spies, who immediately notified the Romans about what they believed to be the actual task of the traitors. The Roman commander ordered that the fugitives have their hands cut off, then sent them back to Hannibal. Frontinus, 3. 16. 4.

could actually treat this as an attempt at misinformation²⁰⁷ and act completely contrary to the info that he was given. All this, combined with the fact that the Roman soldier was given false information to begin with in case of treason, made for a truly Gordian knot, in which it was impossible to identify any real and useful intelligence. To make matters worse for the deserter, he became suspected of spying for the Romans and had to resort to yet another escape, which would only confirm the barbarians' suspicions. This, in turn, would make the enemy leader reject any information provided by the deserter as false. The Romans achieved a double win – the traitor did not fight for the enemy and all intelligence that he possibly provided was discredited. And thanks to spreading misinformation, the *strategos* could expect that any future action undertaken by the barbarian army would be based on false information. It should be noted here that narrative sources confirm how letters were used to confuse the enemy. One such example is provided below.

In 588 an Avar army was camped close to Constantinople, besieging the fortress of Tzurullon, which sheltered the remnants of the forces led by *strategos* Priscus, previously defeated by the nomads. The capital was in peril and Emperor Maurice had no real strength to stop the armies of khagan Bayan I. So, rather than taking military action, the emperor decided to resolve the matter with a ruse.²⁰⁸ He wrote a letter to Priscus, requesting the commander to hold the fortress for just a while longer, keeping the Avar army occupied, since a Roman fleet had already set sail to the Black Sea in order to strike at the nomad territories and capture the khagan's family.²⁰⁹ The letter was of course intended to be intercepted by the barbarians and no fleet had actually been dispatched from Constantinople; in fact – the emperor likely did not even have enough ships to carry out such a mission.²¹⁰ But the stratagem was successful.

207 Which he knew the Romans to be experts at.

208 More on Rome's policy towards nomads using the example of the Kutrigurs and Utigurs during the analyzed period in Daniel Syrbe, "Reiternomaden des Schwarzmeerraums (Kutriguren und Utiguren) und byzantinische Diplomatie im 6. Jahrhundert," *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 65/3 (2012): 291–316.

209 Sym. 6. 5. 13–16.

210 The reign of emperor Maurice is not widely covered in the most important work dedicated to Byzantine war navy: Pryor, Jeffreys, *The Age of the Δρομον*, 18–21. Broadly, about the time following Constantine the Great's death, when the Roman fleet was in decline: Michel Reddé, *Mare nostrum. Les infrastructures, le dispositif et l'histoire de la marine militaire sous l'empire romain* (Paris: Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 1986), 647–655. See also for a slightly later time: Zuckerman, "Learning from the Enemy," 108–125. In the early Middle Ages, a majority of sea fleets were created on an *ad hoc* basis: Archibald R. Lewis and Timothy Runyan. *European Naval and Maritime History, 300–1500* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1985), 22. This was the situation during

The terrified Avar khagan lifted the siege and hurriedly marched with his army back over the Danube to defend against the non-existent invasion force, since he did not possess any navy that could stand against Roman ships. This was actually one of the reasons why Bayan I sent an envoy to the Longobards, asking for experienced shipwrights who could help the nomads build their own navy. This means that the khagan was aware of Roman dominance on the seas and afraid of the strategic and tactical advantage that it gave; and he was looking to change that.²¹¹ This is an example of pure psychological warfare combined with attempts at misinformation, where the principal weapon was simply a letter carried by a brave messenger.

The author of *Strategikon* was aware of the problems that the Roman army was struggling with, including desertions and defections to the enemy. Traitors weakened the army, lowering the morale of their former comrades, and could also provide sensitive information about the size and plans of the Roman force to the enemy. To counter this real and serious issue, the Romans needed a solution that would prevent the deserter from fighting for the other side and destroy the credibility of the information he carried. Traitors are rarely taken at their word, based on the assumption that whoever betrayed their masters once, may do so again. So, anything that could put into question their truthfulness, even if it came from intercepted correspondence,²¹² meant that either intelligence from such deserters was rejected outright as deception, or the enemy commander had to treat it with great reserve. Nobody would put the outcome of a pitched battle on the line based on uncertain information provided by a fugitive. We also must bear in mind that at least a portion of the knowledge possessed by any Roman deserter would be incorrect, since their commanders were expected to keep soldiers unaware of future plans, sometimes even deliberately spreading misinformation among the ranks. We can also safely assume that army leaders knew which units were more likely to prove unfaithful, for example, based on which tribe they were recruited from, and used this knowledge by only providing false plans to such compromised units, expecting treason. If all soldiers remained true to their oaths, the unit did not suffer any actual harm due to being misled by the commander. Similar tricks are used to

the reign of emperor Maurice, who did not have a larger war fleet at his disposal. Simply put, the Empire was going through a crisis caused by an epidemic and could not afford to maintain a large central navy. In his letter, the Emperor did not speak of possessing a fleet but about the traditional perception by its neighbors of Rome as a sea power.

211 Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum*, 4. 20.

212 Strat. 8A. 28.

this day, particularly with regard to providing the enemy with subtly crafted intelligence that only seems credible and is anything but.²¹³

A truly unique and unorthodox method was given by the author of *Strategikon* for dealing with professional enemy spies (κατάσκοπος)²¹⁴ caught while on scouting missions. The Romans had a clever way of identifying enemy spies who penetrated the army; it was based on the army's organization. The commander ordered all the *contubernales* to go to their tents. Since the organization of the *contubernium* relied on the friendship between its members, it was not possible for a spy to blend in with the soldiers. This also meant that a soldier who was left on the square without a place in a tent was exposed an enemy spy.²¹⁵ These methods were especially employed in large armies where the soldiers did not know each other. One thing worth noting here is that the treatise devotes a lot of space to ways of capturing spies that have already infiltrated the Roman army.²¹⁶ It must have been a serious problem in Late Antiquity, but with the number of migrating and intermingling tribes in the Balkans, it should come as no surprise.²¹⁷ An eyewitness account from a spy provided relatively comprehensive information about the enemy army, granting one side a significant advantage. It should also be emphasized that commanders would have no reason not to believe the reports of their intelligence and scouting specialists. Operating within enemy ranks was highly risky and required a very specific set of skills, including the ability to blend in with the crowd.

Regardless, once the Romans had captured someone spying on the army, this is what was advised:

If an enemy spy is captured observing our forces, it might be a good idea to let them go free and unharmed if our army is strong and well prepared. The enemy will reject their report completely. On the other hand, if our

213 A good example is the plan of deceiving the enemy that historically was probably the largest in scale, i.e. Operation Quicksilver. Misinformation is a military trick that has been used throughout the ages, see: Jon Latimer, *Deception in War* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), and another work devoted to the 20th century: Michael Eliot Howard, *Strategic Deception in the Second World War: British Intelligence Operations Against the German High Command* (New York: Norton & Company, 1995).

214 Theotokis, *Byzantine Military Tactics*, 177–180.

215 Strat. 9. 5. Similarly: *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 6. 1.

216 Strat. 9. 5.

217 We should bear in mind that Roman spies were supposed to infiltrate the enemy army by disguising themselves as barbarians. This would have been possible only if the opposing force was ethnically diverse, like the Roman army, or if the spy actually had barbarian lineage, which would aid him in his task. Strat. 9. 5.

forces are weak, the spy should be dealt with brutally, forced to divulge all of our enemy's secrets and then sentenced to death or be sent to the back lines under guard.²¹⁸

Once again, we see how the Romans were able to turn a seemingly negative situation to their advantage. The captured spy became a tool of the Roman commander, allowing him to influence the morale of the opposing army and the decisions made by its leader. Application of these methods is confirmed by the reliable Frontinus who describes how Ventidius used an uncovered Parthian traitor to feed false information to the enemy side.²¹⁹ This was yet another aspect of psychological warfare, where stratagems served to create a false image of one's army. This image was then presented as truth to enemy soldiers, either to compound their fears or reinforce their feeling of security. The spy was supposed to take a good look at the Roman army, which had nothing to hide, boasting rather of its power.²²⁰ On identifying the enemy infiltrator, the Romans could also prepare a carefully crafted show for his benefit, presenting the best soldiers that Romans had to offer²²¹ and planting further misconceptions in the spy's mind. If the enemy did not give credence to the report about the well-prepared and combat-ready army, they were in for a surprise once the battle had begun. It was even possible to scare the enemy commander into retreating on the basis of reports that were themselves based on falsified information. Furthermore, after giving his report to the commander, the espionage expert would likely tell his thoughts and observations to his brothers-in-arms. As we have already discussed the mechanism of spreading rumors, we know that similar information was disseminated rapidly and could lead to catastrophic results. Upon hearing news of Roman power, even if the army leader did not believe it, the enemy forces could quickly lose their spirit, thus losing the fight before it even began. By using such released spies, Roman commanders could also sow misinformation to disrupt enemy plans. The author of *Strategikon* actually advised that rumors be spread among enemy ranks, to make them believe the Roman army would do one thing, and in reality to do the exact opposite.²²²

218 Strat. 8B. 29. See also *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 17. 91.

219 Frontinus, 1. 1. 6.

220 This is exactly what was done by Valerius Laevinus. He ordered an enemy spy to be led around the Roman camp and then sent away. Frontinus, 4. 7. 7.

221 This piece of advice is found first in Roman military treatises from the 10th century. See: *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 17. 91.

222 Strat. 8A. 8.

It is also rather obvious that if a spy saw a poorly equipped and ill-prepared army, he should be captured at any cost. This type of information could under no circumstances reach the ears of the enemy commander, who would undoubtedly use it against the Romans. Hearing about the sorry state of the opposition, the barbarian leader could begin forcing a pitched battle in order to destroy the Romans' manpower. In this situation, if an enemy infiltrator was caught, he would be tortured²²³ (literally "treated/punished brutally" – *κολάζω*)²²⁴ and executed, or in the best case imprisoned. This is exactly what Emperor Maurice did with two Slavs who were captured by the Romans and suspected of espionage. The emperor decided to send them to the back lines, heavily guarded, first personally questioning them about their origins and intentions.²²⁵

Similar methods must have been used against the Romans, because the author of *Strategikon* advised how to protect against misinformation spread by traitors and deserters. If an enemy soldier switched their allegiance to serve the Romans, they should be treated with a heavy dose of reserve and caution. Most likely, no serious military plans would be made based on information gathered from traitors.²²⁶ The enemy could be taking a similar approach as the Romans, deliberately giving out false information to the men. Romans could also be dealing with an enemy spy who was only pretending to reject his previous allegiance, so he should not be informed about the true plans of the Roman army but should rather be given fabricated intelligence.²²⁷ If such a turncoat turned out to be a spy after all, he became an involuntary tool of the Roman commander, spreading confusion and misinformation among the enemy force. Running back to his actual masters, he carried with himself false information that only served Roman purposes. Such traitors who switched sides had to be approached with great vigilance even in times of peace.²²⁸ The same was true for any information that they were willing to provide. A Roman commander had to always bear in mind that any turncoat might still be working for the enemy, trying to lead the *strategos* astray. So, one should not base one's entire intelligence solely on reports of runaways from the enemy side but

223 This could allow the Roman commander to learn more about the enemy. The spy became a valuable source of information.

224 See, e.g.: *ὡς κολάζω τὸν ἀδικούντ' αὖ*. Euripides, *Bacchae* 1322.

225 Sym. 6. 2. 16. This fragment was comprehensively analyzed in: Wołoszyn, *Theophylaktos Simokates und die Slawen*, 321–326.

226 On the other hand, a commander should immediately pay traitors any rewards promised to them, to retain their trust and to encourage potential future traitors. *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 13. 1–2.

227 Strat. 8A. 35.

228 Ibidem.

try to cross-reference them with knowledge gathered by scouts and information extracted from enemy prisoners captured during skirmishes.²²⁹ Only once the information had been verified in such manner, could it be used for making any further plans of action.

Despite all that, traitors were seen as a valuable commodity. As noted by the author of *Strategikon*:

Stratagems are very useful in times of war. An enemy soldier who defects to our side, despite the problems that it entails, is worth more than if he were killed during combat, because his betrayal is more damaging to the enemy.²³⁰

It would be difficult not to agree with this sentiment. Tricks (here, deceptively, *δόλος*,²³¹ which could also be translated as “bait”) have always been useful in warfare. News about a soldier’s betrayal (here, betrayal once again described using the verb for “desertion” – *ἀντομολέω*) would spread like wildfire among the ranks, sowing doubt in the hearts of others, especially those that knew the fugitive personally. This type of information could have far-reaching consequences, even affecting the outcome of an impending battle.²³² If any of the runaway’s tribesmen were in the army, it could inform their own decision about fleeing or even switching sides. And as for the Romans, news that an enemy had defected to their army reinforced their confidence. The thought process was simple: if soldiers from the opposing side are switching their allegiance, it means that the enemy is weak and afraid of us. On the other hand, any information about desertions of Roman soldiers was kept secret by the *strategos*, afraid that this would affect morale,²³³ which only confirms that leaders were aware of the analyzed mechanism and its workings within the Roman ranks.

In conclusion, both sides used exactly the same stratagems in an attempt to trick the opposing force with fabricated information or to lower its morale using psychological ploys.

229 Strat. 8A. 36.

230 Strat. 8B. 6.

231 Although, obviously, the meaning here would be all manner of military ruses, see: τῷ δ’ ἄρ’ ἀνερχομένῳ πυκινὸν δόλον ἄλλον ὕφαινε. *Iliad*, 6.187.

232 A good example would be the Roman unit commander named George, who prior to the Battle of Yarmouk converted to Islam and joined the enemy side. Despite the fact that he died on the second day of fighting, his decision was seen as a bad omen.

233 Strat. 8A. 18.

A separate thing entirely was using traitors and deserters during sieges,²³⁴ as that is when morale plays an even larger part than during regular warfare. Sometimes all it took was for a single betrayer to open the gates at night and the barbarians could easily take the fortifications. This is exactly what the author of *Strategikon* warned against:

You should not admit all of the nearby residents seeking refuge without question. These are frequently sent by the enemy with the intent to betray their hosts.²³⁵

This was a deliberate use of a planted traitor, designed to exploit the defenders' mercy. The author of the treatise approached deserters, who wished to be let in behind the walls, in a similar vein:

We should also be vigilant of deserters who wish to enter our besieged city. They are frequently sent by the enemy to start fires, and once the defenders are occupied with putting the fire out, the enemy is free to attack.²³⁶

These quotes related to the use of deserters and traitors in siege warfare illustrate that barbarians tried their best to exploit Roman compassion. This particular trait would have been the only reason for the Romans to open the gates of a besieged fortress to enemy deserters. The author bade the Romans be wary of such situations, pointing out that the ones seeking admittance are often not fugitives or refugees, but rather enemy soldiers tasked with creating a diversion within the walls. The two quoted passages were about defensive measures, the final one is about capturing fortifications. Once again, the author of *Strategikon* highlights effective non-military means of putting pressure on the enemy:

One of the ways of forcing a besieged city to surrender is sending messages attached to arrows, promising freedom and safety to traitors; enemy prisoners may also be sent with similar messages.²³⁷

234 Psychological warfare was most prominently employed during sieges. Regardless of whether the Romans were the besiegers, or the besieged, the authors of military treatises left behind numerous guidelines on how to deal with soldiers and civilians in order to gain an advantage over the enemy.

235 Strat. 8A. 41.

236 Strat. 8A. 42.

237 Strat. 8A. 21.

Staying for an extended period in a besieged location, under constant mental pressure caused by life-threatening circumstances, hunger, fear, exhaustion and other stress factors, made people more susceptible to military stratagems. The author of the treatise suggested using psychological manipulation on tired defenders, promising freedom to any that decided to betray their side. Such active encouragement could prove successful if this was a prolonged siege with no prospects for relief. It is also worth noting that, apart from the arrow messages, the author of *Strategikon* advised using prisoners (αἰχμάλωτος) who had switched sides, that is traitors.

The Commander

A commander that wishes for peace should prepare for war.¹



The authors of ancient military treatises devoted much attention to the figure of the commander and the desirable qualities of those leading others in combat.² This was particularly important since the Roman military lacked a central training system for the senior cadre, so leadership was often based on the skills and charisma of specific individuals, who learned everything while already performing their duties and followed the advice of older *archons*, usually professionals. Without central training, the presence of traits of a good leader was one of the deciding factors when selecting a candidate for a tactician or *strategos*, who would be expected to motivate soldiers and lead them into battle. A citizen of the Empire wanting to be a successful commander had to exhibit certain characteristics even at the start of their career³ and, notably, these were more important than what family the candidate came from. Then, during their military service, the necessary qualities were honed. One element that could fill the gaps in a person's knowledge was, obviously, the availability of military treatises, from which young students of warfare could learn the basics of how an army operated, or the most important ruses and stratagems

1 Strat. 8B. 6o.

2 The best example is the treatise by Onasander, which has already been mentioned repeatedly, and is devoted mostly to the qualities that a good commander should have. See also Irene Antonopoulou, "Les manuels militaires byzantins: la version byzantine d'un 'chef romain,'" *Byzantiaka* 14 (1994): 95–105. About the role of the commander on the battlefield and in extreme situations see, for example, Thomas A. Kolditz, and Donna M. Brazil, "Authentic leadership in in extremis settings: A concept for extraordinary leaders in exceptional situations," in *Authentic leadership theory and practice: Origins, effects and development*, ed. William L. Gardner, Bruce J. Avolio and Fred O. Walumbwa (Bingley: Elsevier, 2005), 345–356.

3 A very long list of these features is provided in the *Tactica* and the first book of *Sylloge Tacticorum*. It is worth noting that similar lists of features of an ideal commander are a recurring theme in military literature, starting in classical Greece. *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 1. 1–38.

used during military campaigns.⁴ Another major role was played by the *consilium* assigned to a given commander, whose members provided advice as needed.⁵ It was a charisma-based system, which sometimes led to serious problems, especially when an army was more devoted to its commander than the emperor. Situations like these resulted in rebellions, like when the eastern armies refused to comply with the decision to have their leader replaced,⁶ or usurpation of power, which for example happened to both Emperor Maurice as well as his murderer and successor – Phokas.⁷

Instructions included in the treatises of Late Antiquity are representative of a stepping-stone in the evolution of how the figure of the commander was perceived. This was a transitory period between the idealized view of Antiquity and the reality of the medieval times.⁸ A good example could be the idea of *clementia* on the battlefield, understood as mercy towards a defeated enemy. Despite the advice of Onasander, Polybius, or Frontinus,⁹ the commanders of Antiquity only decided to show clemency when actual advantages could be achieved.¹⁰ Using terror was equally acceptable,¹¹ it all depended on what

4 For more on the subject, see the classic piece: B. Campbell, Campbell, "Teach Yourself How to Be a General," 13–29.

5 *Naumachiai*, 5. 1–2. In the case of naval warfare, Syrianus deemed the *consilium* responsible for all knowledge related to the sea and navigation. But we should not assume that it was similar for regular warfare, in which these expert skills were not required. See also: Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 100–101.

6 This is obviously a reference to the mutiny at Monocarton, which has been extensively described in available sources and frequently commented on by modern scholars. See, particularly: Igor V. Krivouchine, "La révolte près de Monocarton vue par Évagre, Théophylacte Simocatta et Théophane," *Byzantion* 63 (1993): 154–173.

7 For more on usurpation of power and military revolts in the period in question, see: Walter Emil Kaegi, *Byzantine military unrest, 471–843: an interpretation* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1981), 120–137.

8 Of course, even in the Byzantine period there were authors writing works on the theory of warfare, in which the figure of the commander was strongly idealized. An example might be the *Tactica*, which has already been quoted here. In a very classical way, perceiving the commander only as a tactician and strategist: Michael J. Decker, *The Byzantine art of War* (Yardley: Westholme Publishing, 2013), 41–65.

9 Although Frontinus suggested to use both clemency and terror as opposites, in order to manipulate the attitudes of own soldiers and the enemy's. See, for example, information about using the severed heads of opponents in order to demotivate the opposing side: Frontinus 2. 9. 2–5.

10 African cities supposedly opened their gates before Caesar due to him being considered a gentle leader. *Bellum Africum*, 88. 92.

11 For example, fighting for revenge – in such case terror and violence were not only accepted, but even recommended. Gilliver, "The Roman Army and Morality in War," 227–9.

would be gained. The primary duty of every Roman *strategos* was to safeguard the wellbeing of his homeland and his soldiers, by any means available.

This attitude was particularly evident in *Strategikon*, whose author willingly referred to the work of Onasander on the subject,¹² but complemented it with new ideas and adapted old ones to the realities of the 6th century. It is notable that each of the quoted authors either directly or indirectly made use of Onasander's crucial work devoted to military leaders.¹³ References to it can be found both in the work of Syrianus Magister and in *Strategikon*;¹⁴ it was also known by most Roman authors writing about the art of command in the Middle Ages.¹⁵ Certain traits of a good leader were considered timeless¹⁶ and relevant both in the classical period and in medieval times in the Roman East. It must not be overlooked that this is an idealized image, largely influenced by literature. Nevertheless, the guidelines included in the treatises were a benchmark for all Roman military men. In his work, Georgios Chatzelis stated that most features of an ideal commander stemmed from promotional literature or biases in historical narratives. The very figure of the commander was more of a moral construct, at least in *Sylloge Tacticorum*.¹⁷ However, looking at the figure of a perfect leader with a focus on their skill in controlling and manipulating people offers a slightly different, more useful picture of the analyzed features.

It is worth analyzing how the image of the commander was presented by the authors of the respective treatises referenced here, beginning chronologically with Vegetius. This overview will bring us closer to what a model commander should be like and what, according to theoreticians, the crucial qualities of a man who decided about soldiers' life and death should be. Obviously, at the

12 The style of Onasander's work was moralizing and at times idealistic, so its message in confrontation with the reality of the battlefield could prove unrealistic. Gilliver, "The Roman Army and Morality in War," 220.

13 The work by Onasander was one of the most prominent military treatises of Antiquity and, similarly to Vegetius's treatise, was later studied by military men both in the Middle Ages and the early modern period. See more in: Daniel Coetzee and Lee W. Eysturliid. *Philosophers of War: The Evolution of History's Greatest Military Thinkers. The Ancient to Pre-Modern World, 3000 BCE–1815 CE* (Oxford: Praeger, 2013), 144–146. See also: *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 1962, and the crucial overview of Byzantine literature: Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur*, 635–636.

14 On the ties between different treatises, see an extensive analysis in: Vladimir Vasilievich Kuchma, "«Стратегикос» Онасандра и «Стратегикон Маврикия»: опыт сравнительной характеристики," *Византийский временник* 43/45/46 (1982/84/86): 35–53, 20–34, 109–123.

15 Although we cannot be certain that all of them had personally read the original treatise.

16 And remain so to this day. See: Thomas Ricks, *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013).

17 Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 103.

same time we will attempt to answer another question related to this study, namely if Roman army leaders were expected to manipulate soldiers and display their confidence in front of their own army and the enemy? If we answer in the affirmative, we will be able to conclude that the art of manipulating people on the battlefield was not only a prominent part of Roman warfare,¹⁸ but was also deliberately used, and any good commander was simply required to possess this skillset and have knowledge about human psychology.

In Vegetius's treatise the commander was presented in an idealized light. It was a vision of someone from the times of the Roman republic, leading heavy infantry into battle, caring about his men as much as about *res publica*.¹⁹ The author of *De Re Militari* mostly emphasized responsibility towards one's homeland, a recurring theme in his work:

As has been illustrated, the possessions of the citizens, the security of cities and the army, as well as the good name of the Republic all depend upon the loyalty and courage of the commander who was granted the highest power. So, he must carefully consider not only the wellbeing of the entire army, but also each individual soldier, because if anything bad should happen to any of them during war, then the fault for this loss, suffered by the state, falls on the commander. Therefore, it is the duty of anyone commanding an army of recruits or men no longer accustomed to wearing weapons, to familiarize himself with the abilities, the morale and habits of each legion, *auxilium* and *vexillatio*. It is good for the commander – if at all possible – to know by name each comes, tribune, member of personal guard [*domesticus*] and even regular soldiers, and to know what combat effectiveness each of them represent.²⁰

What is intriguing is that the passage above refers to something that the authors of military treatises did not usually consider important.²¹ The commander was to be both *fides* (loyal, trustworthy), as well as *virtus* (in this case more than just brave, the meaning of *virtus* should rather be understood in the context of the Greek *arete*). Apart from looking after the good of the homeland and its

18 Which we have already established in previous chapters.

19 We need to bear in mind that the purpose of Vegetius's work was to restore the prominence of the legion system, especially heavy infantry, according to the model from the late republican period. This means that the army presented by the author did not entirely fit into the reality of Late Antiquity.

20 Veg. 3. 10.

21 Strat. 8B. 71. *Strategikon* mentions that the commander should know what to expect of his subordinates.

citizens (mainly those who owned property – *possessores*), Vegetius also refers to the relationship between a commander and his men, stating that a good leader should know his soldiers' names. This was an old military trick, which could be used to improve the morale of a given soldier, as well as the unit they were from. There are numerous examples of this throughout history, but true mastery was achieved by two great leaders of Antiquity, Alexander the Great²² and Julius Caesar.²³ The most comprehensive sources are about Caesar, who during inspections would at times speak to individual legionnaires by name and refer to their past battlefield exploits.²⁴ It was this attention to detail that made soldiers confident their leader cared about them and knew their value (both as individuals, and as a group). This is how commanders guaranteed that men would go into battle more willingly and would stand bravely in the face of their enemies, convinced that the supreme leader surveying the clash knew them and appreciated their efforts (which could translate into rewards granted after the battle). It is difficult to even comprehend how encouraging it must have been for any soldier to be singled out and praised by the person in charge during army inspection.²⁵ It was an excellent way to secure the loyalty of the best soldiers, who usually, due to their experience, would also have been the ones others looked to for advice.²⁶ Vegetius also notes that a leader should

22 A good example of his skills is the situation in the Macedonian camp during the mutiny at Opis. See Alexander's speech and the reaction of his soldiers: Arrian, *Anabasis*, 7, 9–11.

23 E.g. see Caesar's behavior during the Battle of Sabis, where he urged the soldiers and leaders of *Legio XII* to fight on, calling and motivating them by their names. In effect, the soldiers – aware of the presence of their commander – threw themselves into combat with even greater determination. This was all the more important as the army wing occupied by *Legio XII* was wavering, which could have led to defeat. *Bellum Gallicum*, 2, 20–6.

24 Caesar obviously did not remember the names and achievements of all his legionnaires, but he was always accompanied by a trusted commander, who could provide the necessary information.

25 An event that was stressful to the soldiers in and of itself.

26 An example of such experienced soldier who takes the side of his commander during a dispute with the rest of the army can be found in book two of Theophylact Simocatta's *Historiae*. In the passage, a venerable veteran gives a fiery speech to soldiers intending to retreat so as to encourage his comrades to continue fighting for their homeland. Interestingly, at the start of his counter-argument he refers to the words of the instigator of the whole affair, a nameless *chiliarch*, criticizing his attitude in the following manner: *Although the chiliarch is an accomplished speaker and can twist the meaning of words, actions still speak louder and do not suffer bandying idle phrases. He will not scare us with sophisms, as he would children. First, I would gladly ask him: verily, chiliarch, to whom did you address your speech? Your words would only deceive peasants, those who carry winnowing-fans, not swords; who wear leather clothes, not breastplates; who prefer the ploughing ox over the proud horse; simpletons, who serve farmers. Why did you assume that you were speaking to a gathering of women, thus disrespecting both nature and gender? With your speech you*

know how to read the mood in his army and, consequently, to correctly assess the combat-readiness of his troops. So, the leader had to have an understanding of human psyche and, as we know from other passages in Vegetius's work, also had to be able to manipulate it to suit his needs.²⁷

Another highly informative description of a Roman *strategos* was included in *Strategikon*, which lists the duties of an officer in charge and the traits required to perform these duties. It should be pointed out that the character of the commander is frequently mentioned in the section of the treatise devoted to military maxims (γνωμικά), in which many elements were copied from other works.²⁸ Notably, a leader did not have to be an aristocrat²⁹ or come from a prominent family.³⁰ This means that in the 6th century it was still possible to advance through the ranks from a regular soldier all the way to the upper echelons and functions only granted by the emperor.³¹ A good commander was assessed not by their blue blood, but rather their charisma, meaning the ability to galvanize people into action and bend them to their will.³² A *strategos*

belittled our accomplishments, bringing shame upon this assembly. Were you not aware that you were spouting these disgraceful words in the presence of men? Sym. 2. 14. Although the veteran's words are most likely Theophylact's artistic licence, they nevertheless confirm our assumptions about how to address army men. Roman soldiers were tough professionals, used to the hardships of military service and death, so mere oratorical skills would not make much of an impression on them. When speaking to soldiers, one had to be mindful they were a specific group requiring a suitable approach. This approach was explained, e.g. in military treatises. See also: Kotłowska, Różycki, "The Role and Place of Speeches in the Work of Theophylact Simocatta," 353–382.

- 27 See, for example, the already described methods of familiarizing the troops with the enemy: Veg. 3. 10.
- 28 Compare γνωμικά with *Regulae Belorum Generales* from the work of Vegetius. See: Różycki, *Mauricii Strategicon*, 179–189. This only confirms the universal character of desirable features of a military commander.
- 29 Strat. 8B. 54. The author of *Strategikon* stated that a good leader does not need to be of noble origin, but he must be proud of his achievements. A similar attitude was expressed by Syrianus, who believed that a leader should be judged only by his actions. Syrianus, 3.
- 30 Compare: Onasander 1. 19–21 and more emphatically: 1. 21–25.
- 31 Though we should honestly agree that similar situations were not frequent, and the highest-ranking commanders belonged to prominent Roman families, even if these were not strictly part of the state's elite. A possible example of quick advancement through the ranks was the career of Philippicus, the brother-in-law of emperor Maurice. Before Maurice took over the rule of the Empire, Philippicus was his number two in the army of the east. The new emperor needed allies both in the capital and in the army, since he was not part of the Constantinople elite. And so, the rapid career of his trusted advisor all the way to the position of *magister militum* comes as no surprise. Unfortunately, most commanders only appear in historical sources when they are already holding prominent functions, making it impossible to track their previous career in detail.
- 32 Even Vegetius, in a previously quoted passage, highlighted this fact. Veg. 3. 10.

should also be willing to learn new things,³³ be secretive about his plans³⁴ and unwavering in his decisions.³⁵ Another desirable feature was the ability to give a good speech,³⁶ which could be used to motivate the troops.³⁷ The army leader was supposed to be like a skilled (ἀγαθός) wrestler (παλαιστής).³⁸

A strategos should be akin to a skilled wrestler in his actions; be able to feint to one side to deceive the opponent, and then capitalize on the opportunity and in so doing defeat the enemy.³⁹

The wrestling comparison only confirms our previous hypothesis. One of the crucial skills of a good commander was manipulating own soldiers as well as of the enemy. This was significant both at the strategic level and also at the tactical level during combat. Stratagems and a wide array of tricks were the basic tools of the trade for a Roman commander, be it during war or during peacetime.

The author of *Strategikon* also spoke about a commander's everyday life, which should be simple and rough,⁴⁰ just like the lives of his soldiers.⁴¹ This is yet another topos present in literary fiction and in historical accounts of good leaders who won the loyalty of their subordinates by sharing in the hardships of the regular troops.⁴² A commander was usually able to bask in luxury and

33 Strat. 8B. 98.

34 Metellus Pius, when asked what he was going to do the next day, replied that he would burn his own tunic if it could speak of that to anyone. Frontinus, 1. 1. 12.

35 Strat. 8B. 6. A commander should not give in to positive emotions when things are going his way, nor should he sink into pessimism when the enemy is at an advantage. The ability to remain calm throughout a campaign was a very desirable feature in an army leader. Especially since according to the authors of Antiquity, the attitude of the commander would transfer over to his troops. See also: Strat. 8B. 79.

36 Strat. 8B. 74. By using speeches, the commander was to improve the morale of the troops before combat and restore it after a defeat. This is also mentioned by Onasander. Compare: Onasander, 1. 13–17.

37 This aspect will be further analyzed at the end of this chapter.

38 See, e.g.: οὐ γὰρ πυγμαῖοι εἰμὲν ἀμύμονες οὐδὲ παλαισταί. *Odyssey*, 8. 246.

39 Strat. 8B. 77. See also: *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 1. 15.

40 Strat. 8B. 58. The author of *Strategikon* believed that a commander enjoying luxury can lead his army to disaster. Another example is found in book xvi of *Byzantini liber De Re Militari*, where the author unambiguously ridicules the overly wealthy clothes worn by the emperor during the campaign. See: *Byzantini liber De Re Militari*, 16.

41 Strat. 8B. 3.

42 Starting with Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Nikephoros Phokas, all the way to contemporary commanders, like General Patton. On the effectiveness of this procedure, see Thomas Watson Britt et al. "How Leaders Can Influence the Impact That Stressors Have on Soldiers," *Military medicine* 169/7 (2004): 541–5.

splendor, even when campaigning, but acting in this manner would discourage his men, especially if the army was on the march or on a combat expedition, when even the most basic goods would be scarce. By sustaining the same hardships as the regular soldiers, the leader became closer to them, and the knowledge that they all had to deal with the same inconveniences⁴³ prevented soldiers from wanting to revolt or speaking out in negative terms about the situation or the commander himself.⁴⁴ There was no natural catalyst for the soldiers' discontent if their leader suffered exactly as they did.⁴⁵ In history, there have been many commanders who shared the hardships of the soldier's life and trade. Examples from the Ancient period include Gaius Marius, Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great. In the Middle Byzantine period, Basil I and Nikephoros II fought alongside their soldiers.⁴⁶ A commander's attitude not only positively affected the army's morale but could also inspire courage in soldiers.⁴⁷ So, this piece of advice was doubly valuable – the leader did not antagonize the men with his higher status, and thanks to his frugal attitude won their respect and admiration, thus securing their loyalty. A Roman *strategos* should also bear in mind that his attitude could carry over to his subordinates, which is why he had to be in control of his behavior, especially in public situations.⁴⁸ This was especially important in the time leading up to a clash. According to the author of *Strategikon*, soldiers assessed their chances of victory based on the commander's behavior, so he needed to exude an aura of calm and confidence.⁴⁹ This, in turn, would affect the rank-and-file, making them more confident as well.⁵⁰ A *strategos* was also advised to frequently modify his appearance, in order to confuse possible conspirators or enemies wishing to abduct or murder him.⁵¹ All this confirms the importance of non-combat skills for any good commander. *Strategikon* paints a picture of someone

43 Marcus Cato supposedly drank the same wine that regular oarsmen drank. Frontinus, 4. 3. 1.

44 Not favoring relatives was supposed to achieve the same goal. Frontinus mentions Metellus, who dispatched his son as a regular legionnaire to a frontline unit. Frontinus, 4. 1. 11.

45 Which is not to say that this was a foolproof way of blocking the soldiers' discontent.

46 Leo Diaconus, 3. 7.

47 McGurk, Castro, "Courage in Combat," 181–182.

48 Strat. 8B. 79.

49 Strat. 8B. 90.

50 Not showing fear or alarm before your subordinates is one of the most basic tenets of leading soldiers on contemporary battlefields. Obviously, not much has changed in this matter over the ages.

51 Strat. 8B. 87. The author of *Strategikon* goes as far as to suggest taking cues from Hannibal by using wigs and different beard styles.

humble, self-sacrificing for his subordinates, someone putting service above personal comfort, but – when necessary – cynical, and willing to exploit people for the greater good that was the Empire.⁵² A leader with a similar attitude would be able to mobilize the troops and win their admiration, respect and unwavering loyalty.

During a battle, the *strategos* should be surrounded by a personal retinue of soldiers, who could be used as the final reserves, or as messengers. This detachment, sometimes formed out of *bucellarii*,⁵³ highlighted the leader's importance on the battlefield and protected them from danger.⁵⁴ The actions of Philippicus during the battle of Solachon in 586 illustrate their role.⁵⁵ At one point, the *strategos* had to quickly sort out the situation on one of the flanks, when the cavalry assaulted the Persian camp and, instead of fighting, began looting. Philippicus reacted immediately, giving his distinctive helmet to one of his trusted aides (who Theophylact Simocatta archaically referred to as *doryphoros*), Teodor Ilibinus, who then went to the disobedient soldiers and forcibly restored order (by beating the looters with the flat of his blade).

We have to remember that the army standard was also positioned next to the commander, and that these both had a symbolic significance. In the past, symbols were hugely important in the army, and remain so to this day.⁵⁶ The death of a leader during battle,⁵⁷ just like the fall of the army standard, would

52 Obviously, not all qualities of a good commander should be manifested before one's subordinates.

53 The subject of detachments deployed personally by commanders has captured the imagination of many exceptional scholars, see for example: François Aussaresses, *L'armée byzantine à la fin du VI^e siècle, d'après le Strategicon de l'empereur Maurice* (Paris: Feret & Fils, 1909), 13, footnote 6; Oliver Schmitt, "Die Bucellarii. Eine Studie zum militärischen Gefolgschaftswesen in der Spätantike," *Tyche* 9 (1994): 147–174; Jean Gascou, "L'institution des bucellaires," *Bulletin de l'Institut français d'Archéologie orientale du Caire* 76 (1976): 143–156; and for the times of Stilicho: Hans-Joachim Diesner, "Das Bucellariertum von Stilicho und Sarus bis auf Aetius (454/55)," *Klio* 54 (1972): 321–350. It should be mentioned that although during the reign of Justinian the Great these were private units, deployed and financed by the army leaders, in the times of Maurice (i.e. the period when *Strategikon* could have been written) they had already been included into the army structure, and given an elite status.

54 Authors of military treatises advised against a heroic attitude during combat, aware of the importance of the commander on the battlefield. A different view was expressed in works of history; a prime example in the period in question would be the work of Procopius, modelled after classical Greek literature. For more, refer to: Whately, *Battles and Generals*, 188–195.

55 Sym. 2. 4.

56 This power has already been analyzed here, when describing magical thinking.

57 Sometimes even a rumor of the commander's death was enough. This is supposedly how Pyrrhus was defeated by Valerius Laevinus. Frontinus, 2. 4. 20.

have a double meaning to the soldiers. From the point of view of the entire army, they lost the one person who coordinated all their efforts, and any change in the command structure while already in combat would inevitably result in confusion. But in reality, the death was also symbolic. It was the death of the man who led soldiers into battle, who cared for them and their well-being, who meted out rewards and punishment. The figure of the commander became a symbol for the whole army, and despite seeming an insignificant event in the context of the ongoing battle, their fall would usually lead to defeat.⁵⁸ Soldiers became discouraged, often beginning to flee even before the battle had been resolved.⁵⁹ History has seen examples of how merely a rumor of the commander-in-chief's death resulted in widespread panic among the men.⁶⁰ The author of *Sylloge Tacticorum* stressed that any soldier who was physically strong could perform brave deeds, but only a *strategos* could command, and that is why they were not take part in direct fighting.⁶¹ Equally important was the commander's banner, usually equivalent to the army standard; it marked the position occupied by the leader, serving as a clear landmark for the soldiers and a reminder that the person in charge is still with them.⁶² The fall of the standard was often interpreted as signifying the death of the commander and as a signal to cease fighting and commence the retreat. Taking all that into consideration, the leader should not personally take unnecessary risks,⁶³ although sometimes a simple show of confidence could really improve army morale.

58 This fact is also confirmed in military law. The authors of Eclogue noted in *Nomos Stratiotikos* (following the *Digesta*, see also *Digesta*, 49. 16. 3. 22.) that should any soldiers abandon their leader if in a position to protect him, and the leader then falls, the penalty for those who ran away will be death. Ecloga, *Nomos Stratiotikos*, 20.

59 Which is why Clearchus discouraged Cyrus from joining the fighting directly, arguing that the king would not achieve much even with his strength, and if he fell, the battle would be lost. Polyaeus, 2. 2. 3.

60 This is what befell emperor Romanos Diogenes in the Battle of Manzikert in 1071.

61 *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 4. 1.

62 For example, Roman cavalry units were referred to in the Antiquity and Middle Ages by the term "bandon," a word that obviously stems from the word for the army banner. *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 250. Compare the significance of unit standards on the example of Hungarian *banderium*, which itself originated from the Italian *bandiera* and meant the standard of the unit assigned to the commander. In the 14th century in Hungary the term *banderium* was used to refer not to the banner, but the whole unit. This clearly exemplifies the importance of standards on the battlefield. Ferenc Sebok, "Banderium," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Medieval Warfare and Military Technology* v. 1., ed. Clifford J. Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 118.

63 Strat. 8B. 100.

There have been cases when soldiers forced their commander to reposition himself to a safer spot. During the Battle of Solachon in 586 this is exactly what happened to *strategos* Philippicus.⁶⁴ The commander listened to his *archons* but before that, by occupying an exposed advance position, he clearly communicated to his men that he was not afraid of the battle and trusted they would be victorious. This would raise the morale of any soldier in sight, even if it was simply a calculated decision by the *strategos*. The authors of military treatises were aware of the symbolic significance of a commander on the battlefield, which is why commanders were advised not to risk their lives. Although the army leader did not have a large part to play during actual combat, he remained a symbol to the fighting men, and his demise could completely break the army's spirit and result in an all-out retreat.⁶⁵

Sharing in everyday difficulties brought the soldiers and their superiors closer together and established mutual trust.⁶⁶ It is worth noting that a Roman commander should not be afraid to "get their hands dirty" during field duty.⁶⁷ This, of course, was to have a positive impact on the rank-and-file:

When crucial tasks are performed, the commander should not stand idly by, as if these are somehow beneath him; instead he should work together with his soldiers. This will make the men more obedient, even if only through shame, and the *strategos* will achieve more.⁶⁸

This was pure theatre of war, where the commander played the lead role. Leading by example is very effective and, as rightly stated by the author of the treatise, creates a feeling of community, especially if the *strategos* cared for his men and expressed this personally and publicly. Participating in crucial everyday duties formed a bond between the soldiers and the superior officer. To this day similar methods are used in highly hierarchical workplaces, where there is distance between the boss and his subordinates. The superior's participation

64 Sym. 2. 3. 10–12. Which is consistent with the opinion expressed by the author of *Strategikon*: *The commander should not throw himself into the thick of fighting too rashly, because if anything unexpected should happen, the whole army might be destroyed.* Strat. 8B. 100. and Strat. 7B. 1.

65 The fall of the army leader's standard was enough to spark panic and retreat from the battlefield, even if the army had actually been winning up to that point.

66 See the attitude of Cyrus, who would partake in simple physical labor in order to raise the morale of his forces. Frontinus, 1. 11. 19.

67 Compare to the work of Onasander, who also postulated to select commanders from among men unafraid of hard labor. Onasander, 1. 6–7.

68 Strat. 8A. 1.

in sometimes menial tasks builds *team spirit* – *esprit d'équipe*⁶⁹ or, in the case of the army, *esprit de corps*. Interestingly enough, this advice from the author of *Strategikon* was not to be followed on the day preceding a battle, as this was when the commander should avoid any distractions, focusing all his attention on the plans for the coming clash.⁷⁰ The treatise also states the army leader should take part in everyday jobs more than other soldiers and should take a lesser part of the spoils, through which he would gain true respect in the eyes of his men.⁷¹ And we need to be mindful that spoils could turn out to be quite a problem⁷² and the cause of mutiny even in well-ordered armies.⁷³ According to the author of the treatise, the army leader should also show consideration for his subordinates, focusing especially on how they were fed and paid.⁷⁴ The importance of food for an army was mentioned by Vegetius as well, in the context of raising morale before a fight. According to this author, in the days past (*veteribus saeculis*):

... it was customary to lead men into battle following a light meal, so that the food would grant them strength and courage and they would not be weakened by hunger if the engagement dragged on.⁷⁵

Proper food and timely pay were of key importance to the morale of every professional army. Distributing pay before the entire army or taking group meals⁷⁶ created a feeling of community among the soldiers, strengthening the

69 See modern methods of manipulating groups of people in work environment, based on mechanisms very similar to those described here: John Newstrom and Edward Scannell. *The Big Book of Team Building Games: Trust-Building Activities, Team Spirit Exercises, and Other Fun Things to Do* (New York: McGraw-Hill Education, 1997); Barry Heermann, *Building Team Spirit: Activities for Inspiring and Energizing Teams* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997).

70 Strat. 7B. 1.

71 Strat. 8B. 51.

72 On the importance of spoils in the period in question, see: Shlosser, *The Reign of the Emperor Maurikios*, 102–107. Compare also Homer's description of the battle by the ships and the fate of Toon, who was dealt a fatal blow by the spoil-hungry Antiloch. The victor very nearly paid with his life for this success. *Iliad*, 13. 389–405.

73 Sym. 6. 7. For example, when Priscus decided to distribute spoils in a way that was unfavorable to the soldiers. The decision resulted in a mutiny and the whole situation was later only diffused, according to Theophylact, thanks to the general's oratorical skills.

74 Strat. 8A. 3.

75 Veg. 3. 11.

76 See: Pauline Schmitt Pantel, "Dining in Ancient Greece," in *A Companion to Food in the Ancient World*, ed. John Wilkins, Robin Nadeau (Oxford: Wiley, 2015), 224–234. On the subject of establishing group identity through shared meals, see: Peter Scholliers, "Meals,

bonds between them. Conversely, lack of pay or problems with provisioning,⁷⁷ and especially hunger (*inedia*), could quickly lead to open revolt.⁷⁸ In the

Food Narratives, and Sentiments of Belonging in Past and Present,” in *Food, Drink and Identity Cooking, Eating and Drinking in Europe Since the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Scholliers (Oxford: Berg, 2001), 3–23.

- 77 More about military provisions, especially in the middle Byzantine period in John Haldon, “The organisation and support of an expeditionary force: Manpower and logistics in the Middle Byzantine period,” in *To εμπόλεμο Βυζάντιο (9ος–12ος αι.) / Byzantium at War (9th–12th c.)*, ed. Kostas Tsiknakis (Athens: Goulandri-Horn Foundation, 1997), 111–151; John Haldon, “Feeding the army: food and transport in Byzantium, ca. 600–1100,” in *Feast, Fast or Famine: Food and Drink in Byzantium*, ed. Wendy Mayer and Silke Trzcionka (Brisbane: Brill, 2005), 85–100. More about nutrition in Late Antiquity in Maciej Kokoszko, Krzysztof Jagusiak and Zofia Rzeźnicka, *Cereals of antiquity and early Byzantine times. Wheat and barley in medical sources (second to seventh centuries AD)* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2014).
- 78 See, e.g. the rebellion of the eastern army commanded by Priscus following the news about the soldiers’ pay reduction. Sym. 7. 1. 1–9. 26. Simocatta’s version was also adopted by Walter Emil Kaegi, who claimed the mutiny was the result of a scheme by Philippicus using the topic of pay reduction to sow discord among the men. Supposedly, it was Philippicus’s goal to retain the command of the army, that had been taken from him, by forcing emperor Maurice to dismiss Priscus, a man unpopular with the troops. Kaegi, *Byzantine military unrest*, 68. Kaegi claims that Maurice sentenced the leaders of the mutiny to death, which is false, since despite being found guilty by the court, the soldiers’ lives were eventually spared by the emperor. Evagrius Scholasticus, 6. 10. The wages of the imperial army were a serious drain on the central budget, especially in the period of recurring plagues. A breakdown of amounts paid out to the soldiers was provided in: Herz Peter, “Finances and Costs of the Roman Army,” in *A Companion to the Roman Army*, ed. Paul Erdkamp (Oxford: Wiley, 2007), 308–313. However, the most accurate calculations can be found in the work of Warren Treadgold: Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, 141–148. Repeated outbreaks of plague had a significant and disastrous impact on the fiscal policy of emperor Maurice, who apart from extensive military efforts also had to deal with constant natural disasters that ruined the treasury. In the opinion of Anastasios Sinakos an accurate evaluation of Maurice’s reign is impossible without taking into account the natural disasters that occurred in his time, especially the consequences of successive plague waves, see: Anastasios Sinakos, “Η επίδραση των λοιμών και των φυσικών καταστροφών του τέλους του 6ου και των αρχών του 7ου αιώνα στη διαμόρφωση της πολιτικής του αυτοκράτορα Μαυρικίου,” *Έωα και Έσπέρια* 6 (2004–2006): 97–121. More general remarks on climate changes and their impact on the societies of Antiquity, see: Susanne Kerner, Rachael Dann and Pernille Bangsgaard ed. *Climate and Ancient Societies*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2015. On how fast plagues spread before modern times, see: Susan Scott and Christopher J. Duncan, *Biology of Plagues. Evidence from Historical Populations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 371–376. During Maurice’s reign there were two instances of a recurring epidemic, in the years: 588–591 and 599–600, which combined with droughts and infestation of locusts have led to famine in large areas of the Empire. This forced the emperor to look for savings in expenditure, with the army being one of the affected areas, which sparked great discontent among soldiers. A new approach to the plague is presented by a group of researchers who play down its

10th century, the author of *Sylloge Tacticorum* wrote knowledgeably that when fighting in the sun, soldiers should eat less but more frequently. This was to be beneficial for their digestion; the recommendation was to take care of soldiers' wellbeing by means of their diet.⁷⁹ Another duty of the commander was to care for the financial future of his men. It was Vegetius who left behind probably the most comprehensive description of what to do with the soldiers' money to improve their morale and ensure loyalty towards their unit:

In the olden days, and likely by divine inspiration, a custom emerged that half of the donativum collected by soldiers would remain stored in the headquarters, still being their property. In this way, soldiers would not squander everything on excesses and trifles. It is often the case for men, particularly poor men, to immediately spend all the money they manage to earn. So, putting some of it away for safekeeping would be beneficial, to the soldiers first and foremost. They live at the state's expense after all, so the donativum kept secure in the camp only increases the amount of money they own. Secondly, any soldier who knows that some of their money is stored away in the headquarters guarded with the unit signs, does not think about abandoning it, but becomes that more attached and, when need arises, that more courageous in its defense. It is simply human nature that we care most about that which is our own property. Each of the 10 cohorts would keep their money in a separate bag or pouch, stored together with the signs. Additionally, there was an eleventh bag, to which small donations would be paid by men from the entire legion. This money was used to pay for burial services in the event of a legionnaire's death. All these bags were placed in a chest guarded by signifers. That is why signifers were to be not only trustworthy but also able to write, so that they would guard well the money placed under their protection and know how much is owed to each soldier.⁸⁰

significance, especially in the context of the deteriorating Roman state; Lee Mordechai and Merle Eisenberg. "The Justinianic Plague: an interdisciplinary review," *Byzantine and Medieval Greek Studies* 43 (2019): 156–80; Peregrine Horden, "Mediterranean Plague in the Age of Justinian," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, ed. Michael Maas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 134–60; John Haldon, et al. "Plagues, climate change, and the end of an empire: A response to Kyle Harper's *The Fate of Rome*," *History Compass* 16/12 (2018): 1–10.

79 *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 57. 1.

80 Veg. 2. 20. See also Alphonse Dain, "Sur le « peculium castrense », " *Revue des études byzantines* 19 (1961): 253–257.

As we can clearly conclude from the above passage, it was the commander's task to care for his soldiers' finances during peacetime and when units were stationed in their *castra hiberna*. Vegetius gives a very reasonable argument that some soldiers would have never had large sums of money at their disposal, so they were prone to spending all of their pay immediately after receiving it. This could lead to problems down the line, when men did not have any more cash, making them more susceptible to bribery⁸¹ or more interested in looting enemy bodies than actual fighting. By storing a portion of the *donativum*⁸² in a joint reserve, soldiers made their future more secure and additionally – their loyalty to the unit grew. Vegetius points the reader's attention to the mechanism that was at play here. Any man who had some of his pay stored in the camp under guard would be less likely to betray their comrades or desert. Any action that could result in the soldier being discharged from the unit translated to a tangible loss of his money. Vegetius illustrates his keen insight into human behavior by stating that: *It is simply human nature that we care most about that which is our own property.*⁸³ So, the commander could exploit this human trait and secure the loyalty of his army by manipulating his subordinates' attachment to material things.⁸⁴ To the Romans, all was fair in war.

1 Military Discipline

Roman army leaders were handed an excellent tool to motivate the troops⁸⁵ or, when necessary, suppress undesirable behavior, be it during peace or at

81 Compare, e.g. Syrianus, 7. 4–12; Aeneas Tacticus, 5.

82 In Late Antiquity, *donativa* were quickly exchanged by the imperial *campstor* into bronze coins, more convenient to use. This custom is confirmed by an inscription commemorating John, who followed the imperial army and held the function of *campstor*; see: Catherine Asdracha, "Inscriptions chrétiennes et protobyzantines de la Thrace orientale et de l'île d'Imbros: III^e–VII^e siècles: présentation et commentaire historique," *Αρχαιολογικον δελτιον* 49–50 (1994–1995): 279–356. The gold from the *donativa* soon made its way back into imperial coffers after being exchanged into easier-to-spend bronze coins. This resulted in a high demand for bronze coins, which could be minted closer to the army, decreasing production and transport costs. See also: Johannes Karayannopoulos, *Das Finanzwesen des frühbyzantinischen Staates* (München: Oldenbourg, 1958), 101.

83 Veg. 3. 11.

84 Agesilaos II is claimed to have said that a soldier fighting to defend all of his wealth will fight that more fiercely. Frontinus, 1. 11. 5.

85 A well-administered punishment could be motivational. See McGurk, Castro, "Courage in Combat," 175.

war. This was Roman military law,⁸⁶ which nevertheless had to be enforced carefully and with great consideration for human nature. It provided multiple options for influencing soldiers, but used incorrectly could lead to serious problems. The very existence of a strict penal code, based on the concepts of joint responsibility and collective punishment, introduced an internal control mechanism among the ranks.⁸⁷ The law, however, was simply a tool and it was the skills of individual leaders that determined if the tool was used effectively. A balance had to be struck between penalties and rewards.⁸⁸ Focusing too much on one or the other could lead to a breakdown of morale in the entire army. Sometimes, enforcing a harsh provision of law at the incorrect moment could yield results that were opposite to what was intended.⁸⁹ This was also observed by the authors of military treatises, who sometimes advised leniency in punishments, and at other times suggested using the most severe penalties available. Much depended on the situation and the overall atmosphere in the army, and assessing that was the responsibility of the commander. Compare this with the actions of Belisarius during the Vandal campaign, especially the severe punishments (impalement for murder) for the barbarians allied with the Romans. In this way the Roman commander established rules for the whole army taking part in the campaign.⁹⁰ It is worth noting that this happened even before encountering the enemy, when the troops were still in transit on ships, so Belisarius did not have to worry about morale, or the possibility of mutiny. Let us now look at several guidelines from the treatises.

Vegetius suggested enforcing military law at all times, without any leniency towards one's subordinates, writing in a strongly republican spirit:

86 On military crimes see Taxiarchis Kolia, "Τα στρατιωτικά εγκλήματα κατά τους βυζαντινούς χρόνους," in *Έγκλημα και τιμωρία στο Βυζάντιο*, ed. Spyros N. Troianos (Athens: Goulandri-Horn Foundation, 1997), 295–316.

87 In contemporary times, see Castro, Adler, McGurk, Thomas, "Leader Actions to Enhance Soldier Resiliency in Combat," 3, 9–10. While in this case the authors considered the collective punishment too harsh and unjustified, they failed to inform about its efficacy.

88 Motivating rewards could include medals, promotions, as well as spoils taken from the enemies. The issue of maintaining equilibrium between penalties and rewards was highlighted in: Lee, "Morale and the Roman Experience of Battle," 204. At the same time, Lee points out that military law in Late Antiquity was slightly more lenient compared to the republican period. The basis for this claim was the author's conclusions drawn from reading the *Digesta*; however, we have already learned that the legal provisions in Late Roman military treatises maintained the harsh system of rewards and penalties, at the same time reinforcing internal control mechanisms.

89 Julius Caesar would have been aware of this, since he did not always enforce the provisions of military law when it came to his subordinates. Polyaeus, 8. 23. 21.

90 Procopius Caesarensis, *De Bellis*, 3. 12.

May he exercise his power of commander-in-chief with the utmost severity, punishing according to the provisions of law for the most minor of infractions, so that none may claim to have escaped punishment – in short, let him discipline his soldiers so that they'll be able to perform their duties in any situation and under any circumstances.⁹¹

An approach like that did have its place and likely proved useful in times of peace, when maintaining discipline among the ranks was a key issue. Then, strict adherence to military law would be beneficial. During one campaign, Nikephoros II Phokas commanded that any soldier who dropped their shield would have their nose cut off and would be paraded in front of the entire army. If an officer refused to execute the order, he would face the same fate as that of the soldier.⁹² This way, in one go, the emperor instilled fear in the soldiers, which made them care for their equipment that much more. On the other hand, he asserted his authority among the commanders, who realized that the punishment for disobedience would be harsh. But there were also times when the *strategos* in charge of the army needed to treat his subordinates less harshly or even suspend carrying out legal sentences altogether. One specific example was the period before a battle, when men were subjected to most extreme stress factors, so the heaviest penalties were better rescheduled, not to intensify the stress of the soldiers, which could even lead to a rebellion. For the same reason, punishment should be administered to specific soldiers, rather than the entire military community; this was expected to prevent soldiers from uniting in a sense of grievance and raising mutiny.⁹³

Many provisions of the military penal code dealt with crimes during combat.⁹⁴ Soldiers had to be aware of the penalties that awaited them⁹⁵ for offences committed while engaging the enemy, which is why leaders were obligated to familiarize their subordinates with the applicable rules and regulations. Even the moment of communicating the provisions of military law regarding crimes in combat was supposed to affect the soldiers. The army was deployed in battle formations and the leader stood before the front lines,

91 Veg. 3. 10.

92 Leo Diaconus, 4. 2.

93 *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 17. 1–2. Individual punishments were to be administered especially to mutiny leaders.

94 In *Strategikon*, the author devoted an entire paragraph to crimes committed during fighting, which is as much as one third of the whole passage on military law. Strat. 1. 8. See also the intriguing issue of decimation in: Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 123–129.

95 Clearchos reportedly believed that soldiers should fear their own commanders more than the enemy. Death in battle was merely a possibility, but the penalty for running from the battlefield was supposed to be certain. Frontinus, 4. 1. 17.

reading out the military regulations for all to hear.⁹⁶ In this case, strict military law was to be a preventive measure that would discourage anyone from doing anything prohibited by it.⁹⁷ This was the foundation of all military discipline and tactical order in combat. The Roman army operated on the basis of tactical schemata⁹⁸ and any deviation from these (be it fleeing from the battlefield or charging the enemy without a clear order) could have catastrophic consequences. The fear of severe punishment was used to force the soldiers to be obedient and disciplined in battle. However, the author of *Strategikon* emphasized the following:

While in battle, the leader should turn a blind eye to infractions committed by the soldiers, but immediately once the battle is done, the offenders should be removed.⁹⁹

Any misdemeanors that happened during an engagement should be deliberately overlooked (here, ἀμαρτάνω). It is hard to imagine that arresting a soldier for breaking military law would be considered a good idea during an ongoing battle.¹⁰⁰ In fact, it would only cause unnecessary chaos, and the arrested culprit would have been eliminated from a fight in which he could still prove useful. Not to mention the potential reactions of his comrades. This suggestion likely did not refer to all manner of crimes; least of all to instances of fleeing from the battlefield, which could set off communal conformity mechanisms.¹⁰¹ But lesser infractions, like for example looting the bodies of fallen enemies,

96 Strat. 1. 8. Interestingly, C. Whately claimed that being able to read was not a common skill among the Roman officer cadre. Whately, “The Genre and Purpose of Military Manuals In Late Antiquity,” 253. This provision disproves his sentiment. The author of *Strategikon* actually points out that any leader holding the rank of *menarch* or higher should know how to read and write. Strat. 1.4.

97 Studies on the issue of military law in the context of psychology for the Latin-speaking west in Late Antiquity are discussed in: Wilczyński, “Oddziaływania psychologiczne i dyscyplinujące w armiach późnego antyku,” 841–852.

98 See one of the best analyses of tactical schemata for the period in question in the work: Syväne, *The Age of Hippotaxotai*, 93–312.

99 Strat. 8A. 15.

100 Similar recommendations applied before fighting. Soldiers who committed less serious crimes were supposed to be treated more leniently; actually, the idea was to pretend that nobody knew anything. In the case of major crimes, the perpetrator had to be called away from the battle line under the pretense of military issues, to prevent his deserting or defecting. As a result, the commander did not undermine the army’s morale before fighting and silently got rid of potential traitors from a formation. *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 15. 1–2.

101 In situations like these it was crucial to react quickly and radically, in order to stop panic from spreading. Pieter, *Strach i odwaga*, 112–113; Martin, Hewstone, “Conformity and Independence in Groups,” 222–224; Allport, *The nature of prejudice*, 285–286.

could wait to be dealt with until after the engagement. Administering justice before the entire army once the battle was done had an educational purpose, served as a deterrent and confirmed the inevitability of punishment. A.D. Lee heavily emphasized that the main factor at play here was shame.¹⁰² A soldier would be motivated by three things to remain on the battlefield: honor, fear and shame before his brothers-in-arms. So, publicly punishing one of them was to intensify the feeling of shame and act as a warning. In the republican period it was most evident how this process was stimulated from the top down. Soldiers who managed to avoid *fustuarium supplicium* for running away from the battlefield were forced to camp outside the fortifications, separated from the rest of the army, and content themselves with grain rations that were normally distributed to slaves, not soldiers.¹⁰³ In this way cowards were stigmatized and temporarily excluded from the military community. In a close-knit group of soldiers, which governed itself according to strict rules and the idea of camaraderie, such penalty must have been harsh indeed.

Another important aspect was the commander's attitude to Roman military law, which was a useful tool. The legal code was expected to be known and followed by everyone, from the lowest-ranking soldier to the *strategos* in charge of the whole army.¹⁰⁴ This made it possible to use the law in building a leader's authority and influencing soldier behavior. Through the just and strict enforcement of military regulations, a commander was to inspire fear in his subordinates. However, a procedure to appeal to a higher instance was also available to any soldier who felt that a superior had wronged them, or abused their authority and power.¹⁰⁵ As has already been mentioned, it is better when soldiers are more afraid of their officers than the enemy, but the notion of justice and equality before the law was also of great importance.

Any disciplinary action should be quick and decisive, and occur as soon as an issue emerged. This was particularly important in the case of rising discontent among the ranks, which might evolve into a full-fledged rebellion. Obviously, we must remember that there were exceptions to this rule, like e.g. before a battle, when soldiers should not be punished too strictly.¹⁰⁶ In the case of mutiny, the idea was to punish the leaders severely, but to apply moderation or amnesty in the case of regular rebels. Interestingly, before the mutiny which ended with Nikephoros I Phokas on the throne, the future

102 Lee, "Morale and the Roman Experience of Battle," 203.

103 Lee, "Morale and the Roman Experience of Battle," 203.

104 This was the purpose of publicly reading out the provisions of military law. Strat. 1. 6. See also McGurk, Castro, "Courage in Combat," 175.

105 Strat. 1. 4. 3.

106 Strat. 7A. 6; Strat. 8A. 2.

emperor had already participated in a rebellion. In the 6th century, a mutinous army still managed to repel the invading Persians near Monocarton¹⁰⁷ and, after the fighting ended, the participants did not face any consequences, not even the ringleaders.¹⁰⁸ There are many equally interesting examples of this type of behavior in the Middle Byzantine period seen from commanders and rulers alike. Emperor Michael II undermined the mutiny by Thomas the Slav, offering amnesty to all his supporters, while Thomas was sentenced to a cruel death.¹⁰⁹ John Kourkouas treated mutinous troops in a similar way, sentencing the leaders, Bardas Boilas and Adrian Chaldos, to blinding, while the remaining defeated supporters escaped serious consequences.¹¹⁰

Military law was a valuable asset to any person who knew how to use it and who could correctly assess the morale of the army. Authors of treatises warned against too strict adherence to provisions of law, being aware that people in extreme situations react differently to constraints and penalties. This perfectly illustrates that prescriptive sources on military discipline represent to a large extent merely what the lawmakers wished to be, rather than actual reality. If even in military treatises we find information about some laws being suspended in extreme situations, it means that in reality the provisions could not have been followed to the letter all the time, likely depending on the will of a given *strategos* and his ability to read the mental condition of his troops. The best-case scenario was for the commander to project an image of someone just and true to his principles; strict, when necessary, but forgiving when possible.

2 Social Control System in the Roman Army

When researching the social control system in the Roman army, first one needs to define the notion of “social control”, which may be understood in a number of ways in today’s science. The term itself was first used in 1890 by Edward A. Ross, who defined it as the intentional rule of society over the individual, as opposed to the unintentional social impact on an individual.¹¹¹ An extremely important quality of this definition is the intentionality of the standards imposed by the group which forces conformism upon its members.

107 Sym. 3. 3.

108 Krivouchine, “La révolte près de Monocarton,” 154–173.

109 Skylitzes, 217.

110 Skylitzes, 40. Skazując niektórych na wygnanie.

111 Émile Durkheim, *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1895).

For the sake of this book, I will use a simplified contemporary definition – a social control system.¹¹² The pattern of social control is quite simple. First of all, one needs to conclude that a certain community of people creates, adopts and respects standards which include patterns of behavior regarded by the community members as “their own”. Therefore, being a member of this community requires that these patterns be followed. If an individual does not conform with the pattern, this will be noticed by other members of the community. Should a standard be broken (if it is important for the community, and if the adherence to it proves the belonging to that group),¹¹³ then the community will take steps to return the individual to the right path, to force them to follow the pattern. Moreover, a message is sent to the remaining members of the community, that any behavior in breach of the standard will trigger a response from the community.¹¹⁴

In that case, the mechanism of correcting undesired behaviors of an individual by the community is one of the conditions for social control to occur. This mechanism stimulates the group members to conform to the established or agreed standards. This is closely related to the social impact theory, a general theory about how individuals react to social pressure.¹¹⁵ If a group member breaches a standard, the community may punish them within the confines of established principles. This element will be of considerable importance when discussing social control in the Roman army of the 6th century.

The social group discussed below falls outside the classical description. Soldiers belong to an artificial, highly hierarchical group, the conduct of which is governed by external control principles.¹¹⁶ Despite that fact, the social control system in the army has always existed on a number of planes. As a group, soldiers develop their own standards of behavior, which are not legally sanctioned. These are usually norms of mutual everyday relations between soldiers of the same rank. These behaviors, which are typical of a closed group, are marginal to this work. The main analysis focuses on the attempts to stimulate internal social control by leaders through the application of legal mechanisms

112 James J. Chriss, “Social Control: History of the Concept” in *Handbook of Social Control*, ed. Mathieu Deflem (Hoboken & New York: Wiley, 2019), 9–22.

113 Edward Alsworth Ross, *Social Control: A Survey of the Foundations of Order* (New Brunswick – London: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 89–105.

114 Jacek Wódz, *Socjologia dla prawników i politologów* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Prawnicze PWN, 2000), 46. On the role of social control in the law: Ross, *Social Control*, 106–125.

115 Martin, Hewstone, “Conformity and Independence in Groups,” 222–224.

116 For a contemporary look, showing the difference between conscripted soldiers and volunteers, see Yagil Levy, “Control from within: How soldiers control the military,” *European Journal of International Relations* 23/1 (2017): 192–216.

(i.e. external control), mainly the collective punishment system. In the author's view, this was the first, probably intentional level of operation of the Roman military law, which can only be traced in legal military regulations. The second level of control was external control, imposed under military law by commanding officers when the internal social control system failed. As for the relation between the social control system and external factors, the basic processes of social control include the institutionalization process which imposes patterns of behavior, and the socialization process. These are the internal control elements. Only when the internal control fails, is it necessary to apply the external control mechanisms which govern the system of sanctions, i.e. punishments and rewards.¹¹⁷

The above internal control system, supplemented with the threat of using external control mechanisms (mainly punishments), is a perfect method to introduce discipline within a group of soldiers without directly using the authority of leaders. Such a system assumes that any transgression of an individual within a troop, which is a social group, will be interrupted or, in a critical situation, corrected by the soldiers themselves. The only condition of operation is the existence of institutionalized punishment in a situation where the internal control system fails. Military law governing soldiers is such an institutionalized system of punishments.

The result is a two-tier soldier control system in which feedback occurs. The first tier is the internal control which is exercised on an informal level within a group, often not involving the leader at all.¹¹⁸ The second tier comprises the legal system, which is an external one, and which, as a collection of formal regulations, is subject to strict principles. Close relationships occur between these two systems, so that social relations between individuals in an internal system may be governed by an external system, i.e. military law.

In theory, we have a situation in which soldiers regulate improper behaviors of individuals among themselves, conscious of the punishment that may be inflicted on the entire community (collective punishments) if even one of its members transgresses. The leaders, being aware of how such a system works, try to reinforce self-correction by employing military law regulations.¹¹⁹

117 Ross, *Social Control*, 1–7; Barbara Szacka, *Wprowadzenie do socjologii* (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2008), 163–164.

118 Often it was a system based on watching and informing. See a contemporary publication on the issue: William Staples, "Surveillance and Social Control in Postmodern Life," in *Punishment and Social Control: Essays in Honor of Sheldon L. Messinger*, ed. Stanley Cohen (New York: De Gruyter, 2017), 191–211.

119 See: Polybius, *Histories*, 6, 37–38.

Going back as far as to the times of the Roman Republic, collective punishments in the army were carried out by one's brothers in arms. This was to discourage soldiers from even thinking of desertion. The effectiveness is indisputable,¹²⁰ and an additional result of this must have been the introduction of self-correction into the internal control system. One can imagine a situation where one of the soldiers on the battlefield intends to desert when faced by the enemy. For fear of the punishment that will befall the entire troop, his comrades try to stop him, resorting even to physical coercion.¹²¹ This is a direct action under internal control stimulated by fear of inevitable collective punishment. Despite considerable likelihood of the above argument, these are mere speculations, corroborated only by observations of human behavior.

In the 6th century, a system of military punishments was still in place, ruthless and, by today's standards, brutal. The authors of the *Digesta* described military punishments as follows:

Military punishments are of the following kinds: namely, castigation, fines, the imposition of additional duties, transfer to another branch of service, degradation from rank, and dishonorable discharge; for soldiers are neither condemned to labor in the mines nor subjected to torture.¹²²

Collective punishments held a special place in this system, and their number had grown considerably since republican times. The Roman military regulations in *Strategikon* contain as many as five different cases that required the application of collective punishment. Where the military regulations pertain to all punishments for fundamental military violations, as much as a quarter of them are collective punishments.¹²³ It is worth analyzing each of these cases, understanding how this law affected the internal control system and whether such manipulation of soldiers was an intentional effort or just a welcome side effect.

The first provision of military law that is of interest to us is included in the part regarding soldiers. At this point it is also worth stressing the degree to

120 Phang, *Roman Military Service*, 123–129. Phang considers decimation to be an extraordinary phenomenon due to its collective nature, although he does not analyze the possible social mechanisms instigated by the binding military law.

121 The function of *optio* in a unit was to keep discipline, even if it required resorting to violence.

122 *Digesta*, 49. 16. 3. 1.

123 This is simplified statistics. *Strategikon* contains 20 items of military law, 5 of which include information on collective punishments for violations, but some items pertain to a larger number of crimes.

which the soldiers were familiar with military law. Legionnaires were to be informed of punishments for military crimes the moment a unit was formed,¹²⁴ the leader would obtain the military regulations in writing and then explain them to his subordinates when time allowed. This meant that each new recruit should have heard the information on punishments provided for by the military law at least twice at the beginning of his service, and each Roman *archon* should have had the legal code available in writing. In that case, legal regulations were treated very seriously and the leaders were focused on familiarizing soldiers with them.

The first provision to be analyzed pertains to betrayal and switching to the enemy side:

If anyone should give in to the temptation of defecting to the enemy, he shall suffer the strictest of punishments. Punishment will be meted out not only against the culprit, but also anyone who knew about his plans beforehand, since despite that knowledge they had not brought the matter to their *archon*.¹²⁵

The penalty for such a serious crime was to be thrown to the wild beasts (*βρωσιν θηρ(ο)ις*),¹²⁶ which is in compliance with the *Digesta*.¹²⁷ This was therefore one of the severest penalties, inflicted only for the most serious of crimes. Treason must have been regarded as such. This fragment makes no mention of desertion itself, i.e. weakening of the Roman forces, but of escaping to and strengthening the enemy. Not only those soldiers who betrayed their oaths were punished, but also other members of their unit who knew about the possible betrayal but did nothing to prevent it, or did not report it to their *archon*.¹²⁸ Setting aside the issue of how a court martial intended to prove that the accused had prior knowledge about a traitor's plans, we should focus on the mechanisms that this provision introduced into the internal control system. Syrianus even postulated to additionally reinforce this effect. Soldiers were to confirm the

124 Strat. 1. 6.

125 Strat. 1. 6. 7.

126 Freshfield, *Roman law*, 13. Ruffus' laws also include the *damnatio ad bestias*.

127 *Digesta*, 49. 16. 3. 10.

128 The same provision can be found in the work of Ruffus: *Si quis conuictus fuerit semetipsum hostibus dederce voluisse, ultimo supplicio subiicietur: nec ipse dumtaxat, sed & facit conscii, qui id reticuerint*. Ruffus, 54. *If anyone is to be convicted for wanting to desert to the enemy, he will be dealt the ultimate penalty, he, and any of his accomplices who kept the matter secret.*

death penalty by way of a vote,¹²⁹ sealing the betrayer's fate and strengthening the belief within the ranks that such behavior is unacceptable. Then, the commander would give a speech praising their attitude, concluded with a prayer. We need to bear in mind that in Late Antiquity there were many barbarians in the Roman ranks, who were not always filled with patriotic love for Roman eagles, but chose to enlist due to purely economic or political reasons.¹³⁰ It is not difficult to imagine a situation in which individual soldiers would defect before a battle to the other side, one they felt more closely tied to. The author of *Strategikon* warned against such traitors many times,¹³¹ emphasizing that men should not fight against other members of their tribe and should be sent away if such a battle were to occur.¹³² The problem of military betrayal, then, could have been so severe that the lawmakers decided to address it in a separate provision. In mixed units, Romans would have an easier time overseeing the enlisted barbarians and individual soldiers could more easily pick up on traitorous whispers of those planning to defect. The above item of military law not only encouraged monitoring the behavior of one's comrades, but also imposed penalties for inaction if treachery was likely. In this situation the internal social control system within a given unit was the first and last line of defense against desertions. It was the responsibility of all soldiers to make sure their brothers-in-arms remained faithful, and if there were any doubts – to report them to their superiors. The provision confirms that the authors of the Roman military law readily used the mechanism in question.

After the provision pertaining to the most serious crimes, it is worth taking a look at another, concerning theft:

If anyone finds a stray animal or any other object, small or large, and does not report it and turn it over to his commanding officer, he shall be punished, not only he but anyone who knows about it, as thieves both of them.¹³³

129 *Naumachiai*, 9. 18–19.

130 Edward James, *Europe's Barbarians AD 200–600* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 157–174; Thomas Burns, *Barbarians within the Gates of Rome: A Study of Roman Military Policy and the Barbarians, Ca. 375–425 A.D.* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994); Karen Ramsey Dixon and Pat Southern, *Late Roman Army* (London: Yale University Press, 2009), 67–76.

131 Strat. 8A. 11 (on the use of traitors for your own gains), Strat. 7. 13 (on seeking out traitors using mounted patrols).

132 Strat. 7. 6.

133 Strat. 1. 6. 9.

Yet again, complicity is mentioned. This time the law concerns theft during the time of service (but not during battle, which is governed by other provisions). In this case the penalty requires the return of four times the damage inflicted (*quadruplum*), which was standard procedure when the military dealt with civilians. More on *quadruplum* can be found in Gaius' *Institutes*:

Anyone who seizes the property of another by violence, is also liable for theft; for who handles the property of another more against the consent of the owner than he who seizes it by violence? Therefore, it has been very properly said that he is an impudent thief. The Prætor, however, introduced a peculiar action to be brought in the case of a crime of this kind, which is called the action for robbery with violence; and it may be brought within a year for quadruple damages, and, after a year has elapsed, for simple damages. This action will lie even if the person took only one article, even of the smallest value, with violence.¹³⁴

The pecuniary penalty seems both right (a soldier is not excluded from service, therefore the army is not weaker) and severe. Inflicting such a penalty also on the brothers in arms who witnessed a crime and failed to report it to their commanding officer is supposed to stimulate the internal social control system. During service, upon witnessing a crime, soldiers will be more eager to report it if they know that otherwise they would suffer acute financial consequences. The *quadruplum* was supposed to act in a twofold manner, as a remedy and deterrent.¹³⁵ In such a case, the profit for a group of soldiers was non-existent (only the soldier violating the law benefited) and the risk of losing their own money high, because if the guilty party was convicted, the entire unit suffered. Once again, the first mechanism of control was the informal internal social control, the soldiers were supposed to stop one another from thieving, the deterrent being the severe pecuniary penalty for the whole group, should a crime be committed by one member. An intentional manipulation of the soldiers' behavior can be seen here, in order to achieve as high self-control within the group as possible.

The next three cases of the application of collective punishments occurred when military regulations were violated during a skirmish, therefore they were of critical importance for soldiers and their commanding officers.

¹³⁴ Gaius, *Institutiones*, 3, 209.

¹³⁵ Interestingly, for ordinary theft Ruffus recommended in his code a double remedy and expulsion of the guilty party from service, without resorting to collective liability. Ruffus, 42.

If during a general action or battle the troops who had formed for combat should turn back – may this never happen – without a good and manifest cause, we order that the soldiers of the *tagma* which first took to flight and turned back from the line of battle or from their own *meros* be shot down and decimated by the other *tagmas*, inasmuch as they broke their ranks and were to blame for the rout of the entire *meros*. But if it should happen that some of them were wounded in the battle itself, they shall be exempt from such a judgement.¹³⁶

The above provision is a direct reference to decimation, known since the Republic. The penalty was to be inflicted on all soldiers in the unit who started the flight, with their brothers in arms from their twin units acting as executioners. The penalty itself is nothing new, when it comes to the law of the Republic, the Principate or the Dominate; however, some elements require a deeper analysis. First of all, the authors of military law must have understood human nature. Decimation covers only soldiers of the unit which started the flight from the battlefield, which means that even if the entire army fled, only those who started the panic were punished. The lawmakers would have been careful observers of human behavior, as they probably realized how the mechanism of conformism worked, even if they could not define the reasons for it or name it. Therefore, only those soldiers who initiated the escape were punished, the rest of the army that gave in to the panic was released from liability. It would be technically impossible to punish the entire army and it would surely and considerably affect the army's morale, but a penalty imposed on the perpetrators had to have positive consequences. Once again, collective liability was applied, in addition, the executioners of the guilty were the same soldiers that gave in to the panic. Enforcement of the penalty must have had a devastating impact on the human psyche, affecting all participants. The soldiers from the fleeing *tagma* who were not selected for decimation, were under tremendous mental pressure, similarly to those who carried out the brutal sentence using clubs.¹³⁷ Being collectively subjected to the consequences of fleeing the battlefield, with the penalty having a direct impact on all soldiers – it is difficult to imagine anyone who would not have that image in mind during the next skirmish when the thought of fleeing occurred.

This is yet another example of the external stimulation of internal social control to ensure the better functioning of the army. The first soldier to flee

¹³⁶ Strat. 1. 8. 17.

¹³⁷ The soldier who was the first to flee was sentenced to death by clubbing (*fustibus caeditur*). Ruffus, 32.

the battlefield knew that this deed meant a death sentence;¹³⁸ his comrades, who joined the escape also risked their lives, as back in camp they would be decimated by their comrades. In such a situation, a mentally weaker soldier, overwhelmed by fear, would be stopped by his comrades who feared for their own lives. Thus, the soldiers enforced discipline among themselves. It is also worth noting that Roman military law provided mitigating circumstances if a soldier who fled had been wounded in battle. In such cases, he should be excluded from proceedings.¹³⁹ It was also possible to abandon the penalty if soldiers had good reason to flee, however the legislator defined no such reason. The next provision pertains to signs on battlefield.

If a standard should be captured by the enemy – may this never happen – without a good and manifest excuse, we order that those charged with guarding the banner be punished and reduced to the lowest rank in their unit or the schola in which they are registered. If it happens that any were wounded in the fighting, they shall be exempt from such punishment.¹⁴⁰

No one needs to be convinced of the importance of distinctive signs during battle.¹⁴¹ Standards were used to give basic orders and served as a rallying point, a symbol of a unit and a landmark on the battlefield. A unit's standard therefore played a very important symbolic role and was of key importance for orientation during skirmishes. The very best soldiers were delegated to guard the standard; and there were at least two of them in each tagma.¹⁴² If a standard fell, soldiers were collectively liable. The author of the military code provided for demotion to the lowest rank in the unit. Similarly, as in the previous case, wounds sustained in battle were mitigating circumstances. The aforementioned provision, although it fits the pattern of collective punishments, serve only to stress the significance of standards for the army and to increase, as much as possible, the caution of soldiers bearing the unit's symbols. In this particular case it is difficult to interpret the law as having an intentional impact on the social control systems, especially since there were only two

138 A soldier who, during battle, started to flee first, was to be sentenced to death, with the execution witnessed by his fellow soldiers. Ruffus, 31, see also: Ruffus, 32.

139 Having sustained wounds would mean a courageous fight, which exempted a soldier from being tried for cowardice.

140 Strat. 1. 8. 18.

141 George T. Dennis extensively discussed Byzantine standards and their importance on battlefield; Dennis, "Byzantine battle flags", 51–59.

142 Strat. 1. 5. and the general's standard was guarded by 15–20 elite soldiers. Strat. 2. 15.

standard-bearers in a unit. The provision explicitly stresses the importance of guarding the standard during battle.

The last item of Roman military law discussed here pertains to retreating from the battlefield:

If a meros or the whole formation is routed – may this never happen – when a camp is nearby, and if the men do not retire toward the defenders or seek refuge within the camp itself, but carelessly run off in some other direction, we order that those daring to do this be punished for disregarding their comrades.¹⁴³

The above example is not very different from the provision regarding flight from the battlefield. The penalty for careless retreat was, obviously, not as severe as the decimation of the entire unit, since the violation was not as grave. An attempt to instill order when part of an army is fleeing is usually bound to be unsuccessful, which does not mean that such effort should not be made. The Roman tactics of the 6th century assumed that the defeated unit of *cursores* would retreat to the protection of defensive forces and would continue fighting.¹⁴⁴ In the case of a chaotic flight from the battlefield, the defensive units were practically abandoned by first-line troops. Imposing a collective penalty on soldiers who did not adhere to Roman tactics and training was supposed to trigger internal control mechanisms. Those who retreated in order behind the second line of troops did not have to fear legal consequences, but soldiers fleeing from the battlefield were to suffer collectively one of the described penalties, although not the death penalty.

Despite the absence of sources, we can suppose that soldiers often “took matters into their own hands” for fear that if a crime was committed, external control mechanisms would be triggered, resulting in collective penalties being imposed. It is definitely more difficult to confirm the second part of the hypothesis and practically impossible to demonstrate that military law was designed to intentionally stimulate such group relations between soldiers. However, the circumstantial evidence collected allows us to make certain speculations. Collective penalties were used only in grave cases (treason, flight from the battlefield) or cases arduous for the system (theft of civilian property). The key circumstantial evidence is the first analyzed case; *Punishment will be meted out not only against the culprit, but also anyone who knew about his plans beforehand,*

143 Strat. 1. 8. 19.

144 Różycki, *Mauricii Strategicon*, 36–53.

*since despite that knowledge they had not brought the matter to their archon.*¹⁴⁵ This means that the penalty was imposed on soldiers who failed in the internal social control system. In that case, the impact of the external system on the internal one was intentional. It was the intention of military legislators that soldiers, within their community, should mutually control their behavior and when faced with an opportunity to commit a crime, respond adequately (report to the commanding officer, stop the fleeing soldiers etc.). The internal social control system in the Roman army was in place and was semi-formal in nature, being the first line of Roman military law and an efficient instrument of oversight in the hands of the commander. Only when internal control failed was external control initiated, with its regulations, courts and inevitable penalties, often inflicted on the entire group responsible for the failure.

3 Information

As we have already established, rumor was a powerful weapon in the hands of a skilled commander and the fact that it spread rapidly among the ranks (both in the Roman army and the enemy's) guaranteed that information would reach every soldier through informal communication channels. The commander could use rumors for his own gain, for example by spreading information among those closest to him before a battle that the enemy does not outnumber the Romans and that what the soldiers are seeing is mostly spare horses and baggage trains.¹⁴⁶ Unconfirmed information of this sort, entered into public circulation through informal means, took on a life of its own, often being affected by the snowball effect. So, a rumor could be a useful tool, but had to be used with great care, and in small doses. Otherwise, the commander could lose credibility in the eyes of his soldiers. The steward of Constantinople apparently acted in a similar way, whenever the emperor left the capital city to personally command the army. At a time like this, hearsay flourished and the population must have felt uncertain, bereft of the ruler's care. The emperor's steward was primarily in charge of putting a stop to malicious rumors concerning the progress of the imperial army. He also had leave to spread positive rumors in order to boost the civilians' morale, for example, informing the inhabitants in vague terms that they had received orders from the emperor,

¹⁴⁵ Strat. 1. 6. 7.

¹⁴⁶ This example has already been analyzed when discussing methods of fighting fear.

even if it was not true.¹⁴⁷ As a result, the inhabitants were certain that the military campaign was being successful and the emperor is still exercising authority in the capital city.

Another foolproof way of motivating the troops was by controlling the available information and distorting the image of reality. A leader could filter the data that was disseminated among the men, preventing news of any defeats from getting out¹⁴⁸ or exaggerating Roman victories on other fronts. The author of *Strategikon* advised commanders that they should keep bad news about Roman losses to themselves, especially if these occurred in remote border areas – this left army morale unscathed and the soldiers' faith in the Roman war machine unwavering. Conversely, news of any successes of Roman forces should be spread far and wide, likely counting on it improving the spirits and confidence of the troops.¹⁴⁹ A *strategos* was even allowed to deceive his subordinates, if necessary.¹⁵⁰ And it was actually the duty of any leader to inform the army about any other victory that the Romans won elsewhere against the enemy they were currently facing.¹⁵¹ According to the author of the treatise, similar information inspired courage. In reality, it set in motion a very simple mechanism that we have already covered when describing methods of fighting fear of the unknown.¹⁵² Hearing about other victories over a given enemy, soldiers gained confidence, realizing that their opponents were not invincible and had already been defeated by the Romans elsewhere. This is a classic example of blocking a fear response. The mechanism was also used at the tactical level. In the work of Polyaeus we find an anecdote about Myronides, who during a battle with the Thebans told the soldiers on one of the flanks that the other had already defeated the enemy. Its effect was that soldiers advanced even more boldly and achieved a great victory.¹⁵³ This stratagem was only possible thanks to the soldiers' tunnel vision in combat. To clarify, during an

147 *Constantini Porphyrogeniti tres tractatus de expeditionibus militaribus imperatoris*, (B) 72–79.

148 Supposedly, this is what Agesilaos did at Coroneia, when he withheld information about the Spartan nauarch Peisandros dying in battle, fearing it might affect morale. Instead, he informed the soldiers that the Spartan fleet had won a glorious victory, which encouraged the men to fight even harder. Polyaeus, 2. 1. 3.

149 Strat. 8A. 13.

150 Going as far as to falsify reports! See the previous example of Agesilaos.

151 Strat. 8A. 12.

152 Where both Vegetius and the author of *Strategikon* suggested using the mechanism of spreading rumors to improve army morale before engaging barbarians not previously encountered.

153 Polyaeus, 1. 35. 1.

engagement fighters only see and focus on the fragment of the battlefield that is in their immediate vicinity,¹⁵⁴ leaving the broader perspective to unit leaders and the army commander.

There were also instances when Romans had to fight rumors spread by the enemy. In one speech, Constantine VII warned about the stratagems of the Hamdanids, who apparently did not have significant numbers of troops but, out of fear, were spreading rumors about the military forces and reinforcements on their way.¹⁵⁵ This was intended to prevent the Romans from attacking their territory. On the other hand, it could have been a rhetorical trick played by Constantine, wanting to show his soldiers that the enemy's poor military strength was not a threat. This would be the familiar mechanism of depreciating the enemy in the eyes of one's soldiers.

A rumor or an outright lie spread informally did have the power to affect reality, and although it should be used with caution, using it at the correct moment could improve army morale and lead to victory.¹⁵⁶ It was the commander's role to identify such correct moments, manufacture an appropriate message and put it into circulation without raising suspicion.

Exploiting the mechanism of how rumors were passed around for one's own gain was the logical thing to do, especially when taking into account the snowball effect that usually happened when news spread. Exaggerating positive information, e.g. about the miserable physiques or poor equipment of the enemy soldiers, or about the victories won by imperial forces against the barbarians, was expected by the leaders who first began such rumors and counted on the positive effect they would have when made known to the whole army. Similar misinformation was also likely not corrected.¹⁵⁷ A Roman commander was allowed to manipulate his soldiers to inspire courage or a feeling of pride about the exploits of Roman armed forces, but this had to be done with precision and care, to not make the propaganda of success too obvious.

154 Holmes, *Acts of War*, 156–158. Tunnel vision also causes soldiers to receive less stimuli during combat.

155 *Military Oration of the Emperor Constantine*, 3.

156 Although relying on lies undermined the soldiers' trust in their leader and could just as easily lead to disaster. For more on this subject, please refer to the discussion on the ethics of command in: Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 228–229.

157 Especially in a situation where spreading untrue information was an acceptable method of motivating soldiers.

4 Commanders' Speeches

One of the most straightforward methods used by Roman army leaders to influence the troops was direct interaction. A *strategos* was supposed to spend time among his men, talk to them and project his self-confidence in order to improve morale. However, this only worked on an individual basis and most soldiers did not have the chance to meet the commander face to face.¹⁵⁸ In the case of an entire army or a larger unit, direct interaction was made possible thanks to commanders' speeches¹⁵⁹ given before the troops. It was a motivational method used before a battle or under extreme circumstances.¹⁶⁰ Soldiers would be affected not only by the words, but the very sight of their army leader, assuring them that he is present and ready for action, just like they are. The actual message of the speech and its intended effects were to be reinforced by lower-ranking officers, who had more frequent and more direct contact with their subordinates.¹⁶¹

Some scholars regard military speeches as literary topos passed down by the historians of antiquity and doubt whether they were ever given. However, they are frequently mentioned even in military treatises of a practical nature. Unfortunately, most surviving speeches included in great works of ancient historiography are more likely fabrications, showing off the oratorical skills of the authors of these works rather than real-life examples. The historiographic battle exhortation developed around the Thucydidean model,¹⁶² and in real-

158 This is when the already-mentioned mechanism of how rumors originated and spread was triggered.

159 See, for example, a study of instances of pre-battle speeches throughout the ages in: Keith Yellin, *Battle Exhortation: The Rhetoric of Combat Leadership* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008). Although it should be pointed out that the ancient origins of this custom are covered rather briefly, see pages: 10–23 and also 49–52.

160 For example, prior to the army entering enemy territory.

161 The motivational aspect of speeches was also noted by Keith Yellin. In the introduction to his work he highlighted the goals of the commander's pre-battle address and what was its role in preparation for the battle or even during battle. Yellin, *Battle Exhortation*, 23–24; 29–31. See also a piece on the art of persuasion in the period in question: Miguel Pablo Sancho Gómez, "Leadership through Speeches: The Role of Greek Rhetoric and the Art of Persuasion in the Roman Empire (96–580)," in *Human Development II: Volume I*, ed. Miguel Pablo Sancho Gómez and Silvia Viñao (Cambridge: Scholars Publishing, 2015), 85–95. On motivation through speeches in the Middle Byzantine period see Karapli, *Κατευόδωσις στρατού* and Anna Maria Taragna, "Logos e Polemos: eloquenza e persuasione nei trattati bizantini di arte militare," *Sicilorum Gymnasium* 57 (2004): 797–810.

162 Yellin, *Battle Exhortation*, 157.

ity invented even earlier, by Homer,¹⁶³ has made it so that military treatises are the only reliable source of information about what such an address to the troops would include.

Irrespective of the above, one indisputable fact is that rhetorical skills and the ability to give public speeches with ease were valuable assets to any commander,¹⁶⁴ as confirmed by the authors of military treatises.¹⁶⁵ However, military speeches were not intended to demonstrate the commander's rhetorical skills. Rather, they were meant to boost the soldiers' morale, to manipulate their mood,¹⁶⁶ sometimes referring directly to individual achievements of soldiers or their units. In a speech, a commander also emphasized his presence on the battlefield and the fact that he was keeping track of the fighting.¹⁶⁷ A fascinating example comes from the 10th century, when a short speech was used during a meeting between the emperor and *thémata* troops on their way to start a campaign. First, the emperor was welcomed by the soldiers, next he approached the commanders who dismounted and prostrated themselves before the ruler (*προσοκύνησις*); meanwhile, ordinary soldiers remained on horseback. Once the emperor received the tribute, he addressed the commanders personally, greeting them by saying "Well met!";¹⁶⁸ "How are you my children?"¹⁶⁹ and asked about the health of their wives and children. The commanders were to reply in unison "In the life of your Majesty, so we, your servants are well"¹⁷⁰ to which the emperor retorted that both him and the commanders owed their good health to God.¹⁷¹ It was a fascinating demonstration of the emperor's power, intended for common soldiers and their commanders alike.¹⁷² Each element of the show was carefully staged in order to create the desired image of the emperor in the eyes of the men.

163 As pointed out by Juan Carlos Iglesias Zoido, "The Battle Exhortation in Ancient Rhetoric," *Rhetorica, A Journal of the History of Rhetoric* 25/2 (2007): 142–144.

164 Onasander, 1. 13.

165 Strat. 8B. 93, see also: 8B. 101.

166 Taragna, "Logos e Polemos" 797–810.

167 Alexander Valentinovich Makhlayuk, "Роль ораторского искусства полководца в идеологии и практике военного лидерства в Древнем Риме," *Вестник Древней Истории* 248/1 (2004): 31–48.

168 *καλῶς εὔρομεν* trans. J. Haldon.

169 *πῶς ἔχετε, παιδία μου* trans. J. Haldon.

170 *ἐν τῇ ζωῇ τῆς βασιλείας σου καὶ ἡμεῖς οἱ δοῦλοί σου ὑγιαίνομεν* trans. J. Haldon.

171 *Constantini Porphyrogeniti tres tractatus de expeditionibus militaribus imperatoris*, (C) 443–459.

172 A slightly different speech, including most of the above elements, was intended for an army meeting the emperor in the vicinity of the battlefield. Interestingly, in this situation the emperor not only asked about the soldiers' journey but referred to future events,

Being a good public speaker with knowledge of rhetoric did not guarantee that a speech would be effective. Addressing army men, meaning simple soldiers used to the harsh realities of life and familiarized with violence was altogether different from showing off your oratorical skills before the Roman senate. This was a craft in and of itself. Ammianus mentions that Barbation's only virtue was the ability to raise the spirits of his men.¹⁷³ The key to success was to correctly structure your message, so as to improve the morale of wavering soldiers and reinforce the confidence of brave ones. Let me refer to Constantine VII's speech to the East *strategoī* in which the emperor mentioned religion, the soldiers' courage and the ethos of service to the country, creating a complete picture of military service and the ruler's role as a guardian with a mandate from God.¹⁷⁴ In a similar way, in his speech to the soldiers, Constantine VII said that he would have preferred to wear armor rather than a purple cloak, to grasp a spear and fight for the Empire, but alas, God had provided all men with specific roles to play.¹⁷⁵

The authors of military treatises devoted much attention to the contents of a model speech, providing advice on how such an address should be prepared. What is notable is that these suggestions are a far cry from the topical patterns established by Thucydides. There are no references to the greater good of the homeland or the soldier's duty, and the grammar structures are rather uncomplicated. The intention was to convince soldiers to risk their lives in combat, and not make an educated reader of high literature shed a tear for their country. We may assume that this is why the speeches and methods of manipulating the soldiers' attitudes included in military treatises are closer to the truth than the fictional addresses found in great works of historiography, which more likely express the opinions of the author than the actual feelings of the commander before a battle.

Even Vegetius, an author who willingly used the literary *topoi* and opinions of great leaders when writing about military speeches, does so in a way that is far remote from the literary archetype defined in prominent historiographical works:

It is, obviously, possible to inspire bravery and lust for battle in soldiers by words of admonition and encouragement, especially if the leader

promising awards for fighting bravely. *Constantini Porphyrogeniti tres tractatus de expeditionibus militaribus imperatoris*, (C) 460–473.

173 Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 17. 6.

174 *Address of the Emperor Constantine VII to the Strategoi of the East*, 1–8.

175 *Military Oration of the Emperor Constantine*, 4. At the same time emphasizing that the emperor's power comes directly from God.

manages to convince them that an easy victory is within their grasp. Furthermore, one can point out the enemies' cowardice or their mistakes and remind the men about how they had already defeated these opponents, provided that did happen. The trick is for the commander's speech to capture the minds of the soldiers, filling them with anger and hatred towards the enemy.¹⁷⁶

The author of *De Re Militari* highlights a number of interesting aspects of a military speech related to motivating one's subordinates. Although these methods of influencing the men have already been discussed here, in a different context, it is worth pointing out that they are also mentioned in reference to a commander addressing the troops. First of all, a leader was supposed to build up trust and confidence in the men based on past successes.¹⁷⁷ If the legionnaires have already faced a given opponent and emerged victorious, that fact should be driven home, while at the same time deprecating the enemy's strength. If the opposing commander has made mistakes in the past, these should be recalled and highlighted, so as to undermine his ability to lead an army in the soldiers' eyes. By following the suggestions listed above, the speaker could persuade the soldiers to become more confident in their own abilities and that of their leaders, at the same time nurturing their contempt for the enemy.¹⁷⁸ The mechanism was that of blocking fear of the enemy, while simultaneously improving the morale of one's army. However, the *strategos* in charge had to know how to use this method of shaping the soldiers' perception in moderation, since having a force of overconfident men was also not desirable.

Syrianus Magister took a different approach, meaning that, instead of the contents of the speech itself, he was more concerned with the technical details of public addresses and order-giving. The author was aware of the problems inherent in trying to communicate an order or a speech to the whole army, often numbering in the thousands. Luckily, the Roman army did have heralds (*κῆρυξ*) responsible for the direct dissemination of the orders and speeches

¹⁷⁶ Veg. 3. 12.

¹⁷⁷ Courage achieved through anger can be a powerful ally for a soldier. If you look at courage itself with a binary approach, it is simply a form of transforming fear into anger. Pieter, *Strach i odwaga*, 185.

¹⁷⁸ This also elevated the commander-in-chief in the eyes of the soldiers. We should remember that *Strategikon* advocates a different approach. The author encourages commanders to mention positive things even about the enemy. Strat. 8B. 101. This was to convince the men that their leader was a just man, who would never omit his subordinates when handing out praise and recognition. Following this advice was likely dependent on the current situation of the Roman army.

given by the *strategos* to the soldiers. Syrianus heavily emphasized the role of ancient army heralds (στρατοκήρυξ), who served as the official voice of the commander.¹⁷⁹ In Syrianus's treatise the term στρατοκήρυξ was replaced with simply "herald" (κήρυξ),¹⁸⁰ but these had a job more limited in scope than that of their earlier counterparts.

An army herald in the past was responsible for communicating orders both during peacetime and when at war. This meant that if a *strategos* wanted to give a command to any unit in combat, he did it through the person of the army herald. Obviously, the leader's actual voice would not have been heard at the other end of the battlefield, so this issue had to be resolved somehow. In the time of Syrianus, army heralds lost their status, since their role was taken over by soldiers tasked specifically with disseminating orders, four in each unit. Two of these were messengers carrying verbal messages, the third was responsible for bugle signals,¹⁸¹ and the fourth transmitted orders using unit signs – mainly banners.¹⁸² The advantage of this system was that any unit on the battlefield could carry out the commander's orders regardless of the weather or acoustic conditions.

In the period that Syrianus lived in, the job of the herald in the Roman army was limited to those times when soldiers remained relatively quiet. The herald communicated orders, commands and speeches of the army leader during breaks on the march, while in camp or shortly before going into battle. Although Syrianus does not specifically mention addressing troops before combat,¹⁸³ we know from other sources¹⁸⁴ that this was also part of the job of

179 There were instances of heralds being used for misinformation. Polyaeus gives the example of Cleomenes, who during his battle with the Argives employed heralds to deceive the opponents (the Argives sat down to eat breakfast, convinced that the Spartans had done the same). Polyaeus, 1. 14.

180 Syrianus explains this change with the reduced role of the herald compared to ancient times.

181 *Naumachiai*, 7. 2. Syrianus points the reader's attention to the issue of communicating orders also in his treatise on naval warfare, emphasizing that in land-based operations the trumpet is irreplaceable.

182 More on communicating commands by using flags, in: Dennis, "Byzantine battle flags," 51–59. See also: Babuin, "Standards and insignia of Byzantium," 5–59, especially footnote 1, which contains possibly the most comprehensive list of the literature of the subject.

183 In the treatise on naval warfare, Syrianus stresses that before combat the *strategos* should address his subordinates directly. *Naumachiai*, 15.

184 Syrianus additionally points out that orders are often given to officers, who then communicate them to their subordinates. In the same manner an army leader's speech could be disseminated among the ranks. This practice was employed by Julius Caesar. Before an engagement, he gathered his officers in one place and spoke to them, and they would later address men under their command. An excellent example is the oration before the clash

a herald in the East Roman army. In Syrianus's work the aspects that we would find the most interesting are basically absent, as the author focuses on technicalities. However, even this fact may be used as an argument for the existence of pre-battle addresses. Since so much space and attention was devoted to the methods of communicating orders and speeches, we can reasonably conclude that similar motivational methods were, in fact, used.

The most important type of speech, the one that most frequently appears in narrative sources, is the pre-battle address, aimed at rousing the soldiers and motivating them to fight. Prior to an engagement, the tension in the ranks must have been palpable, so a leader had to mentally prepare the men for the coming clash. Having already employed all available fear-blocking stratagems, the commander still had a single ace up his sleeve to raise morale and make the enemy seem less frightening – giving a speech. The author of *Strategikon* has left us with probably the most comprehensive description of how a speech should be prepared and delivered, with all the rhetorical and theatrical aspects that it entailed:

At the correct moment the troops should be gathered, divided either by meros or by moira, not everyone at once in a single place. Suitable speeches should be given to encourage them, recall past victories, promise rewards from the emperor and payment for their service to the homeland. Next, written orders should be read by archons to all assembled tagmas.¹⁸⁵

The author of the treatise considered these addresses to be a crucial component of the art of command¹⁸⁶ and in his opinion any good commander should have some skill in rhetoric, which would prove useful when interacting with subordinates.¹⁸⁷ Highlighting the role of speeches in *Strategikon* and the importance of a general's oratorical skills indicate that, in the times of Emperor Maurice, addressing the troops did have a practical application. By implementing the solutions listed in *Strategikon* it was possible to solve

with Ariovistus. Caesar summoned “centurions of all ranks” and gave a rousing speech convincing them to assault the enemy. The officers were then sent to share the contents of the speech with their men, which they clearly did, as evidenced by the delegation of soldiers sent from *Legio X*, who wanted to personally thank Caesar for his trust. *De Bello Gallico*, 1. 40.

185 Strat. 7A. 4.

186 Compare: Onasandros, *Strategikos*, 1. 13–17 and 14.

187 Strat. 8B. 93. See also 8B. 101.

the technical problems that commanders of Antiquity faced.¹⁸⁸ First of all, individual units were addressed,¹⁸⁹ which ensured the message would be understood by all soldiers. We should point out a speech would only be heard clearly by some of the men, although according to John Keegan around 5,000 soldiers could understand what was spoken if they were in a formation four ranks deep.¹⁹⁰ The author of *Strategikon* believed that one should not address the troops at the site of the coming battle;¹⁹¹ it should rather be done before combat, while still in camp.¹⁹² Immediately prior to an engagement soldiers were to be focused and maintain complete silence.¹⁹³ Contrary to the work of Vegetius analyzed previously, the author of *Strategikon* did not suggest referring to the soldiers' patriotism. A speech was to be simple in structure. The commander should recall past successes, which would encourage the men

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- 188 Another method of disseminating the commander's speeches was the one used by Julius Caesar. *De Bello Civili*, 3. 90. It is worth noting that according to Anson none of Caesar's pre-battle addresses before the front of the entire army ever took place; and when Caesar wrote down these addresses in his memoirs, he was simply collating and summarizing what he wanted the soldiers to take away from numerous speeches. Edward Anson, "The General's Pre-Battle Exhortation in Graeco-Roman Warfare," *Greece and Rome* 57/02 (2010): 315–316. Another example that bears remembering is Julian the Apostate addressing the troops before the Battle of Strasbourg. The soldiers formed up into columns surrounding the commander, thanks to which most of them could hear his words of encouragement. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 12. 7.
- 189 Meros is an independent tactical unit on the battlefield, usually formed *ad hoc*. A typical Roman army would comprise three *meroi*. Each meros consisted of three moirai. *Strat.* 1. 3. 12–13.
- 190 Keegan, *The Mask of Command*, 55. See also the calculations in: Anson, "The General's Pre-Battle Exhortation," 306–310. with a detailed study on the space that soldiers occupied and the speed of sound travelling through air. The author concluded that in ideal conditions the commander could be heard even by 20,000 men, but it should be pointed out that such ideal circumstances practically never occurred.
- 191 This is the image of military speeches that in contemporary times has been shaped by popular culture, both in books as well as movies.
- 192 Addressing the troops on the day preceding the battle did not have to take long or follow the principles of rhetoric. The audience were simple soldiers and the speaker's goal was to arouse their fighting spirit and block their fear. So, in this case, the oration could very well be as short as the one given by Caesar, consisting of merely fifty words. Mogens Herman Hansen, "The Battle Exhortation in Ancient Historiography. Fact or Fiction?" *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 42/2 (1993): 171. See also Michael Clark, "Did Thucydides Invent the Battle Exhortation?," *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 44/3 (1995): 375–376.
- 193 *Strat.* 2. 18. Maintaining absolute silence in the ranks was also an element of psychological warfare. Roman forces in a clash against Baram did precisely that. The significance of this stratagem is evidenced by the fact that *strategos* Narses requested the leader of the allied contingent to force his men to do the same. *Sym.* 5. 9. 5–7. This situation was analyzed in more detail in previous chapters.

and reinforce their self-confidence. Next, they should emphasize the rewards awaiting the legionnaires for their loyal service to the emperor and Empire. So, the monetary aspect was made more prominent, at the cost of lofty ideals. This was simply using the correct motivation to suppress fear¹⁹⁴ and inspire courage. Referring to previous victories would deprecate the opponents' skills¹⁹⁵ and improve army morale by blocking the feeling of fear of the enemy. The principle at work here was not complicated: since we had already defeated the enemy once, we will do so again; they are weak, and we are strong.

There is one other source that should be mentioned in our discussion of pre-battle addresses, the *Tactica* written during the reign of emperor Leo the Philosopher (886–912). In paragraph 57, the author of *Tactica* provides detailed instructions on the structure and component pieces of a military speech. It gives great insight into the contents of a speech addressed at soldiers and complements the narrative from *Strategikon*. The author of *Tactica* stated the following:

A cantator should speak to the soldiers so as to encourage them to fight. First, he should mention rewards for belief in God, all the boons of the emperor and past victories, as they will fight in the name of God and the entire nation. They fight for their brothers in faith and, if such a situation occurs, also for their wives, children and homeland. Eternally remembered are those who faced off against an enemy in the name of freedom of their brothers; those who fought against the enemies of our God. God is our friend and it is in His power that the outcome of the struggle remains. Our enemy is our enemy because they do not believe in Him. Should the cantator have any other ideas about what to include in the speech, let them do so at their will. Similar words spoken at the correct moment have great power to raise the spirits of the men – much greater than just money.¹⁹⁶

The above passage seems to be a heavily modified and expanded version of the quote from *Strategikon* analyzed prior to it.¹⁹⁷ This is indicated by the contents

194 See: Howard Leventhal, Jean C. Watts and Francia Pagano. "Effects of fear and instructions on how to cope with danger," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 6/3 (1967): 313–321.

195 In this instance the advice provided by the author of *Strategikon* is identical to that given by Vegetius.

196 *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 12. 57.

197 Haldon, *A Critical Commentary on the Tactica*, 266–268. J. Haldon notes that Leo's piece also has close ties with *Rhetorica Militaris*.

as well as the structure of successive sub-chapters in the main body of text. In both treatises, the part on preparing speeches is immediately followed by instructions on having two banners for each unit.¹⁹⁸ But the text in *Tactica* is much expanded compared to the advice found in *Strategikon*.

Once again, we have confirmation of the function of pre-battle addresses, in this instance delivered by the *cantator*.¹⁹⁹ We know from the previous passage of Syrianus Magister's work and from *Strategikon* that the cantator did not communicate the army leader's orders, so addressing the army would have been his main job. But the contents of the speech itself changed significantly. First, the cantator was to call upon the rewards that awaited soldiers from God,²⁰⁰ then the emperor, and finally he should mention previous victories over the enemy. The one new element is the distinct reference to Christian faith, absent from the work of Vegetius, Syrianus²⁰¹ or *Strategikon*.²⁰² The author of *Tactica* suggested making the soldiers realize they would be fighting for their God, their brothers in faith, their families and their homeland. The last two would only be applicable in the context of a defensive war, when the enemy could directly threaten the civil population of the Empire. Eternal glory was promised to those who fought for their own freedom and that of their brothers and sisters against the enemies of God.²⁰³ It is difficult to determine if glory would truly be an influential factor, since it motivated heroes more than common soldiers;²⁰⁴ the motivational aspect would more likely be

198 Compare: Strat. 2. 20 and *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 12. 58.

199 So, the *cantator* had precisely the same function as the στρατοκήρυξ described by Syrianus Magister.

200 References to God in military speeches were a new addition compared to the analyzed treatises and are related to the renaissance of Roman warcraft in the times of the Macedonian dynasty. Haldon, *A Critical Commentary on the Tactica*, 267–268.

201 They are similarly absent from *Rhetorica Militaris*.

202 For more on how religion influenced the authors of military treatises and on the religiousness of East Roman armies, see: Wojnowski, "Religia a wojskowość bizantyńska," 189–205; Agostino Pertusi, "Una acolouthia militare inedita del X secolo," *Aevum* 22 (1948): 145–68.

203 In this case we may observe a kind of evolution of the approach to warfare. Basil of Caesarea considered killing to be one of the most severe sins, and even soldiers who simply did their duty were expected to take penance for taking the life of their fellow man. Basilius Magnus, *Epistula* 188, 8. Leo the Wise saw soldiers rather as defenders of faith, not sinners in need of heavy penance (on their part, the soldiers probably preferred this image as well).

204 Once again, an example from Homer is applicable. Glory is a strong motivator in the *Iliad*. Hector was granted it posthumously by the gods. *Iliad* 15. 610–14. Achilles, when asked to choose between a short life in glory, or a long life as someone unremarkable, chose the former. *Iliad* 9. 410–16. Patriotism, friendship between brothers-in-arms, shame and search for glory all fuel the fervent spirit/passion (μένος) that pushes heroes to act. To a common soldier, the promise of glory would not be motivating, as evidenced by the fact

the reference to the religious community that soldiers were tasked to defend. The author also points out that the Maker always stands on the side of the Romans, as they are granted His favor and friendship. This was a case where a fear response would be blocked by religious values. Religion could be a powerful factor in improving morale and was of great importance to the soldiers.²⁰⁵ An army's belief that it was fighting under divine protection must have helped in blocking or suppressing the fear of the enemy, especially if the enemy was of a different faith. In a pre-battle address, a commander would paint the picture of a bipolar world, where on one extreme there were pagan barbarians and on the other end of the spectrum you had the Roman army shielded by divine protection and fighting in a divine cause, which additionally would be rewarded for victory in this life by a grateful emperor.²⁰⁶

What is more, according to the description in *Tactica*, a speech could be further complemented. Leo VI provided for the possibility that cantators would introduce additional elements in their delivery, to encourage the troops even more. So, the author left military speakers a certain degree of freedom in structuring their addresses, though they should always follow the basic model described in *Tactica*. In his opinion, a speech given at just the right time could raise the spirits better than any promise of monetary rewards.

The message of the proposed speech clearly indicates that the enemy referred to were either pagans or Muslims.²⁰⁷ This is evident from the emphasis on religious differences and evoking the atmosphere that soldiers and Christians remaining in the country were fighting for their very lives. During a defensive war it should be driven home that the fate of the soldiers' families and their homeland depended on their attitude in battle. Introducing this feeling of threat was an ingenious psychological trick intended to further reinforce the soldiers' will to fight. In the case of an offensive war, the author advised to refer to God and the soldierly ethos. The text was likely written at the same time as *Tactica*. This is indicated by the large number of references

how rarely it is mentioned in military treatises; however, soldierly camaraderie was a significant factor, purposefully reinforced and stimulated by commanders.

205 For a later period, see Pertusi, "Una acolouthia militare inedita del X secolo," 145–168.

206 In pagan times it was not uncommon to deceive soldiers by fabricating divine signs. Frontinus, 1. 11. 9; 10.

207 In the analyzed period of the creation of *Tactica* the Empire was mostly involved in the war with the Bulgarian Tsar Simeon, but he turned out to be Christian, so it is doubtful that the example speech was created with this Balkan rival in mind. Byzantine armies also fought the pagan Rus, attempted to retake Crete and recaptured two border cleruchies from the Arabs (Lykandos and Leontokome). The suggested speech could actually be applicable to any of these theatres of war, but the author most likely meant it to be used when fighting the Islamic threat.

to the Christian God, absent from previous works on the theory of war.²⁰⁸ It is very likely that this is an authentic model of a pre-battle address from around the 10th century,²⁰⁹ which would obviously be an evolved version of speeches given before the army in ancient times.²¹⁰ It is a good idea to juxtapose the text with Constantine VII's speech; the emperor was equally willing to refer to religion, stating that Roman soldiers had an advantage over the enemy because of their faith.²¹¹

It is hard to determine when the analyzed speech should be delivered. The passage is from the book of *Tactica* that includes instructions for commanders before a battle, so we should assume that, consistently with what we learn from *Strategikon*, the cantator was supposed to give the speech on the day before the clash, at the latest.²¹² The army leader should also be involved in this performance. A couple of days prior to the engagement, the *strategos* was to assemble his subordinates and inform them about his plans for the coming clash. One of the items of this meeting would also be a motivational speech, which the *archons* were then expected to repeat to their own subordinates.²¹³ It is now worth looking at the procedures that an army leader was expected to follow before an engagement, according to *Tactica*. Shortly before a fight, the commander would stand in front of the assembled army to assess if the troops were combat-ready.²¹⁴ The decision on risking a battle would be made by the *strategos* after learning about the mood within the ranks and the mental condition of his men.²¹⁵ This confirms that in the times of Leo the pre-battle procedures established in the works of Vegetius and in *Strategikon* were still observed. Immediately after the part on addressing the men, the author

208 This does not mean that Vegetius or the author of *Strategikon* did not include any religious themes in their works. But none of them considered it necessary to refer to God when addressing the army before a battle. In both their treatises, the motivating element was the promise of rewards.

209 *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 12. 98. The author of *Tactica* notes that the *cantator* should make use of the speech template provided earlier.

210 We can trace this evolution thanks to our knowledge of *Strategikon* and *Rhetorica Militaris*, i.e. works that became the primary sources for writing this particular passage of the *Tactica*.

211 *Military Oration of the Emperor Constantine*, 1–2.

212 Compare speeches included in *Historia* by Leo Diaconus with those in *Tactica*. Leo Diaconus, 2. 4. and 8. 2.

213 *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 12. 59.

214 Vegetius gives similar advice in his work.

215 *Leonis Imperatoris Tactica*, 12. 60. We cannot discount the possibility that the commander would at that moment also say something encouraging to the men, having the opportunity to do so. This was already the suggested course of action in the treatise written by Vegetius.

of *Tactica* moves on to talk about tactical objectives. Focusing on the subject of a military speech at that particular point within the work clearly illustrates that the final task of a leader before the battle was to care for the soldiers' morale.²¹⁶ Once the fighting started, the only things that mattered anymore were the tactics and the physical strength of the opposing sides.

All the traits expected of a good commander can be summarized by the following passage from Syrianus Magister's *De Re Strategica*, in which the nationalistic attitude of Vegetius was combined with the characteristics described in *Strategikon*.²¹⁷ It is likely the most comprehensive list of what was expected of a person tasked with the burden of leadership and commanding others in combat:

A strategos is someone dealing with strategy. The basic traits of a strategos should be precisely the same as for a high-ranking official. Moreover, a strategos should be brave, have suitable skills to command others, should be cautious in his intents, just in his decisions, in good health, hard-working and unmoved by failure. He should inspire fear in disobedient men and be understanding towards others. He should care for the common good so as not to miss out on anything that could prove useful. A commander should be judged by his actions and be appointed to the function of strategos based on his prior achievements.²¹⁸

Going by what we have learned from the military treatises, the Romans were perfectly aware of what to expect from a good army leader, duty-bound to protect the Republic. Apart from the crucial character traits, perfectly summed up by Syrianus Magister in the passage above, a leader had to be a good judge of people. His knowledge had to be developed continuously.²¹⁹ A *strategos* had to be able to determine if his men were ready for a fight, or if it would be best to avoid confrontation due to poor morale. He should know when to punish soldiers harshly and without remorse, and when being more lenient (here,

216 In the concluding part of Anson's work there is a profoundly wise statement that is difficult to disagree with: *The general content of these exhortations has remained relatively consistent over time. General George S. Patton, before Operation Overlord, gave a speech to the Third Army that was remarkably similar to those given by ancient commanders.* This simply highlights certain unchanging elements of human nature. Anson, "The General's Pre-Battle Exhortation," 317.

217 Syrianus, obviously, would not have been familiar with *Strategikon*, since that work was likely written several decades after his death.

218 Syrianus, 4. 18–26.

219 Among other things, by studying military treatises.

literally, “gentle/kindly”: *προσηγνής*) would prove more effective and ensure success in war. A truly exceptional commander could manipulate his men and employ the tricks and stratagems described herein, going as far as using lies or even murder²²⁰ if that would increase his men’s chances of victory in battle. He should also be able to communicate with soldiers in their own language,²²¹ live among them and share in the difficulties of military life. This ideal Roman commander obviously never existed, but it was the duty of every Roman *strategos* to strive towards that model.

220 This was the fate suffered by the messenger bearing news about the death of Hirtuleius. Quintus Sertorius himself supposedly killed the man with a dagger so that the news about the leader’s death did not reach the forces that were already engaged in battle. Onasander advised similarly ruthless solutions. Onasander, 23.

221 Julius Caesar strengthened the soldiers’ dedication to himself by referring to them as his “comrades-in-arms”. Polyaeus, 8. 23. 22.

After the Battle

Be victorious, but do not test the limits of victory.¹



A battle, according to the military treatises of Late Antiquity was a roll of the dice,² in which the commander was only the initiator of an action whose course, once begun, he could not influence.³ This is partly why one of Roman military maxims stated the following:

It is a better option to hurt the enemy with stratagems, surprise assaults or hunger, never with open battle, the result of which depends rather on luck than skill.⁴

As has been repeatedly pointed out in previous chapters, a commander had the biggest impact when he prepared the army for combat, employed stratagems (δόλος), executed unexpected maneuvers (ἔφοδος) or used hunger (λιμός) as a weapon. But during the actual clash his role would often be reduced to merely that of a spectator.⁵ Sometimes the situation required direct intervention from the army leader and, depending on where he was stationed,⁶ he

1 Strat. 7. 12.

2 Strat. 8B. 4.

3 During battle the commander could only observe the execution of his plan, and if necessary, make use of troops left in reserve. Strat. 8B. 1. There were, of course, situations like during the Battle of Argentoratum, where emperor Julian personally stopped the retreating heavy cavalry, but these were exceptions to the rule. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 16. 12. 40–41.

4 Strat. 8B. 4.

5 Even the issues of tactics and deployment of troops in the coming clash were resolved before the fighting started.

6 The subject of positioning of army leaders during battle was excellently analyzed by Adrian K. Goldsworthy, who identified three repeating patterns: on a hill a short distance behind the army, in the first rank and in the second line (preferred by Caesar). In Late Antiquity the commander would also usually take up position between the first and second line, since it granted the best possibility of influencing the battle, although it did happen that

could try and change the course of events, whether it be personally, by sending reinforcements or dispatching couriers with new orders. Yet, in most cases, how the battle went was beyond the control of the *strategos*. A battle was too dynamic and chaotic to bend itself to the will of a single person. Consequently, much of the responsibility would fall to lower-ranking leaders (in treatises referred to generally as ἄρχων, in contrast to the commander-in-chief – στρατηγός),⁷ stationed among the men doing the actual fighting. The commander's role once again became more prominent after the clash had ended, when the decisions that he made would often be crucial for the fate of the army and the lives of soldiers.

What happened after a battle in Late Antiquity is not easy to track in the sources.⁸ Roman literature of the period inherited the ancient traditions and, with them, numerous literary *topoi*.⁹ Unfortunately, descriptions of battles definitely fall into that category, as they are usually copies of established models, devoid of any realism. This resulted in schematic descriptions, which normally boiled down to information about who won and what losses were suffered by the opposing armies; this was often a far cry from the reality of a given clash.¹⁰ Only a few of the authors of surviving sources understood the army and had personal experience of battle and even those authors would sometimes gloss over the interesting details of the fight or paint an image of the world that was unrealistic but consistent with the established literary principles. As a result, determining what should be done after a battle and what rules should be followed is more complicated than it might seem. And we need to bear in mind that after a period of stress the human psyche is very vulnerable, so a leader in that situation had to be very skilled in dealing with his soldiers.

army leaders went into combat with the first rank of troops. Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army*, 149–163.

7 It is worth pointing out that in many cases the term *strategos* was equivalent to *magister militum*.

8 Which is not to say that none have tried. In the context of new military history an attempt was made e.g. by Goldsworthy, frequently quoted herein: Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army*, 163–167.

9 See an excellent summary of the subject for Antiquity in: Simon Hornblower, “Warfare in ancient literature: the paradox of war,” in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare. Vol. 1. Greece, The Hellenistic World and the Rise of Rome*, ed. Philip Sabin, Hans van Wees, and Michael Whitby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 22–53.

10 On the subject of *topoi* and patterns used in descriptions, see: Michael Whitby, “Reconstructing Ancient Warfare”, in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare vol. II: Rome from the late Republic to the late Empire*, ed. Philip Sabin, Hans van Wees and Michael Whitby (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), 54–82. Also, an analysis of descriptions from the classical period, providing some interesting points on the origins of the *topoi* being studied: Lendon, “Battle Description,” 39–64.

Military treatises do provide certain suggestions,¹¹ but these are often contradictory, requiring additional study. As an example, let us consider the case of how an army should react following a defeat, analyzed further below. Vegetius advised to try and get back into the fight almost immediately, yet according to the author of *Strategikon* forcing recently defeated soldiers to re-engage the enemy was practically impossible. Both pieces of advice, although inconsistent, in reality are based on an understanding of the mechanisms of human psychology, and even if they logically contradict one another, each of them was good in its own way.

This chapter will be divided into sub-sections corresponding to each of the possible outcomes of a battlefield clash: victory, draw or defeat; it will be supplemented with some general remarks on soldier behavior. The above division reflects, at least partly, the division of post-battle behavior as described by the authors of military treatises, who devoted much of their attention to this issue.¹² Each outcome imposed on Roman commanders a diametrically different approach to the soldiers and the enemy. Men do not experience the same emotions when they are victorious as when they are defeated. Only by being aware of this simple fact could a commander react to and prevent the occurrence of negative stress factors that put his subordinates in mortal danger – even after a victory, as the analysis will show. Each possible outcome was touched upon by all theoreticians of war referenced herein; their opinions are at times incompatible with each other, which, contrary to what one might think, does not detract from their value for our study.

1 Victory

In the introduction to this chapter it is stated that once the fighting began, the commander's role was greatly reduced, in many cases limited to nothing more than setting up his battle line, communicating his plans for the clash and giving the signal to advance.¹³ Additionally, army leaders would sometimes also have control over the reserves, which could be used at a critical moment to reinforce a struggling section of the army. There were instances when merely the presence of the commander motivated his subordinates to redouble their efforts. But normally, a leader's role became marginal, making him no more than a spectator in a previously planned show. The actors,

11 Dennis, "Byzantines in battle," 175.

12 See the division of labor by Frontinus: Frontinus, 2. 9. 10.

13 Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army*, 149–163.

following this comparison, would be the common soldiers and their *archons*, who acted according to the prepared script, but had the right to improvise within the bounds of the previously approved plan. It was actually the lower-ranking officers, their ideas and actions that often had the most impact on the outcome of the battle.¹⁴ In Classical and Late Antiquity, and mostly in the Middle Ages too, an armed engagement was usually won by the side that remained in control of the battlefield and was in a state to pursue the retreating enemy (which does not mean that every time the enemy would flee in panic).¹⁵ At least, that is the theory. A different example could be the barbarian world, where control over the battlefield was equal to victory, and the defeated side simply agreed to the imposed conditions of peace, believing that both victory and defeat were granted by the gods.¹⁶

The Romans, seeing themselves as a civilized people, were less categorical in their understanding of victory, which is evident in their theoretical works. Holding the battlefield was not equivalent to winning, and the battle itself, according to the maxim quoted at the beginning, was considered evil. As has already been established in the chapter devoted to Roman idea of warfare in the context of theoretical literature, victory was seen differently, not only as being successful in an armed engagement. It was a better solution to harm the enemy in such manner as to not risk the lives of one's own soldiers. Defeating the opponents by using stratagems, poisoning water supplies,¹⁷ causing hunger¹⁸ or ambushing foraging parties¹⁹ was to the Romans an equally valid victory,

14 A good example could be what happened during the Battle of Solachon, where in the center the Romans decided to dismount while in combat. The fighting was fierce until one of the *archons* ordered the men to aim their arrows at the enemy horses, which caused the Persians to flee. βαυθέρου γούν του μέσου κέρατος τών Περσών γεγονότος διά τήν επί-πρόσθησιν του άποδράντος εύωνύμου κέρατος, χαλεπώς άν είχε διενεγκείν ή 'Ρωμαίων αντί-παλος δύναμις, ει μή τών ίππων άποβάντες αυτών κατασυστάδην τας συμπλοκάς έποιήσαντο. Sym. 2. 4. 5.

15 This was, obviously, true only in theory. In real life whole armies were sometimes lured by their enemies into a trap by exploiting this conviction that one must hold the battlefield. This was done, e.g. by the nomads, who would deliberately withdraw from the field, staging a mock retreat.

16 For the period in question, the issue was broadly analyzed by Hugh Elton, who presented barbarian warcraft in a social and economic context. Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe*, 15–89. Also, more schematically: Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West*, 1–40.

17 Strat. 8B. 99.

18 Strat. 8B. 28. Julius Caesar supposedly said that for his enemies he applies the same treatment that most doctors suggest for bodily ailments – treat them rather with hunger than iron. Frontinus, 4. 7. 1.

19 Strat. 8B. 4.

and could even be more valuable,²⁰ since it did not put Christian lives at risk. But if the enemy was pushing for a pitched battle, and the commander decided beforehand that his odds of achieving victory in open battle are acceptably high,²¹ it was necessary to prepare for that possibility.

After winning a battle, the role of the *strategos*²² leading the army once again became prominent. The theatre of war that took place before the clash has been described in the previous chapters, and has also been analyzed already by scholars using the methodology of new military history. But what happened after a victorious engagement, what should be done and what principles should be followed, has not been studied in detail yet.²³ So, it is worth looking at advice given in military treatises of Late Antiquity to successful commanders. We need to note that the role of the army leader did not end with forcing the enemy to retreat after a previously planned engagement in the field. Once the opposing force had been driven away, the *strategos* had to consider his army's next moves, stage a pursuit, distribute the spoils, give thought to tired and wounded soldiers. All these tasks were important for maintaining the army's combat-readiness. After a clash the men relaxed mentally, which made them more susceptible to external stressors, and the enemy often remained an active threat, still attempting to deal damage to the victorious side.²⁴ A leader had to be in complete control over all stages of the battle, because sometimes even beating the enemy in the field could swiftly turn into disaster.²⁵ After combat, the soldiers could feel euphoric and powerful, sometimes even assume that they were invincible.²⁶ However, that state would be brief and

20 See a whole paragraph on attrition warfare: Frontinus, 3. 4.

21 Strat. 8B. 86.

22 Strat. 7. 10; 11.

23 On the behavior of army leaders after victory, see a brief note in: Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army*, 166–7. The author describes the actions of a number of generals, mostly Caesar, who paid much attention to ensuring the best possible conditions for his legionnaires.

24 As contemporary research suggests, a commander's role in reducing and preventing stress is extremely important; very frequently, an example is most effective. See for example Thomas Watson Britt, et al. "How Leaders Can Influence the Impact That Stressors Have on Soldiers," *Military medicine* 169/7 (2004): 541–545.

25 To prevent that, Hermocrates spread a rumor among his men, having already won the day, that enemy cavalry was still expected to arrive. Thanks to this ruse, the soldiers kept proper watch in the camp (the commander was mostly afraid about guarding the prisoners) and managed to maintain discipline. Frontinus, 2. 9. 6.

26 I could mention the Roman legionaries ready to throw themselves into the Rhine in full armour when chasing the fleeing Alemanni in the last stage of the battle of Argentoratum. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 16. 12. 55. More on this mechanism in William Killgore et al. "Post-combat invincibility: Violent combat experiences are associated with

quickly replaced by fatigue and apathy. The moment after the fighting was the most dangerous one and required the commander's utmost attention.

Similar situations were not unheard of on ancient battlefields where soldiers, exhausted physically and mentally by the fighting and the stress, would react in totally unexpected ways, which could have tragic consequences. The events from 593, during the battles against the Slavic commander Ardagast²⁷ to the north of the Danube,²⁸ are an excellent example of psychological relaxation after a victory. The Romans took the barbarians by surprise at night while the Slavs were attending a wake and, according to Theophylact, the majority of the tribe's members were drunk.²⁹ Easy victory over the barbarians soon turned into an all-night massacre. The soldiers, remaining in enemy territory throughout the long campaign, must have been psychologically drained. It comes as no surprise that fighting with Ardagast's troops was followed by giving vent to emotions. First, the Romans annihilated the Slavs – as Theophylact described it vividly – celebrating all night long in blood. Later they turned to drinking. The celebrating army, still on enemy territory, neglected to post guards, and as a result the Slavs were able to attack the victors and inflict casualties on them. On the following day, the commander Priscus reacted mercilessly: the commanders of the watches were impaled and some of the soldiers whipped to restore discipline, bearing in mind that the campaign was expected to continue.³⁰ This example illustrates how soldiers losing their focus following a victory could pose serious problems.

A commander who managed to force the enemy to flee had to lead his army through several additional stages of the battle, although it should be pointed out that not all necessarily occurred after a victory. For example, it was possible that a fatigued force, fearing an ambush or enemy reinforcements, did not continue pursuit.³¹ This section of the chapter is further divided into sub-sections corresponding to different events that occurred after a victorious battle: pursuit, envelopment, sharing spoils and caring for the wounded.

increased risk-taking propensity following deployment," *Journal of Psychiatric Research* 42/13 (2008): 1112–1121.

- 27 The Avars agreed to a campaign against Ardagast probably because the Slav warlord was beyond the control of Khagan Baian, and remained equally problematic for the Romans and the Avars. See also: Curta, *Making of Slavs*, 94.
- 28 Curta, *The Making of the Slavs*, 102–3.
- 29 Sym. 6. 8–9.
- 30 Sym. 6. 9.
- 31 For example, the Roman commander Drocton decided not to pursue the Avars after the victory at the walls of Adrianople in 586 or 587. Sym. 2. 17.

2 Pursuit

The author of *Strategikon* compared combat to the waves of the tide, which sometimes flow towards the shore, and sometimes away from it.³² Based on the shifting positions of the two sides of the conflict, so poetically described in the treatise, one should not draw too far-fetched conclusions or take unnecessary risks. It only meant that – staying true to the poetic comparison from *Strategikon* – at any given moment the tide could draw closer to victory, just to recede towards defeat in the next moment. Driving the enemy back a short distance, only to allow them to retreat unmolested, was not necessarily a victory. Just like it was not necessarily a defeat to reposition when pressed by the opposing force, so as to form a new battle line in a different place or retreat to the camp to re-engage on the next day. An experienced Roman commander should be aware of this even before committing his forces to battle, it was one of the basic principles of warfare. The goal of each commander should be to strive towards ultimate victory, which was winning the war, not the individual clash.³³ This indicates that a *strategos* had to seize the opportunity (καιρός) when it presented itself.³⁴ This philosophy was nothing new to Roman commanders, who learned from Latin and Greek military treatises and the combined experience of past generations of great leaders.

A battle was not won if the only thing that the Romans did was manage to force the enemy to retreat. We need to bear in mind that in the deciding stage of the battle, i.e. during the actual clash itself, a relatively small number of soldiers perished. It was actually during pursuit that an army suffered serious casualties, as soldiers were already defeated, usually unarmed and debilitated with fear. Giving chase, obviously, was inherently risky but without destroying the enemy's manpower, victory would not be complete. The author of *Strategikon*, the most competent source on this matter of all those analyzed, quotes a saying that was frequently used by young commanders to justify their passiveness:

Win but do not overwin.³⁵

³² Strat. 3. 11.

³³ Strat. 3. 11.

³⁴ Philip Rance, “‘Win but do not overwin’ – The History of a Proverb from the Sententiae Menandri, and a Classical Allusion in St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans,” *Philologus* 152/2 (2008): 191.

³⁵ Strat. 7. 12.

The following situation happened after the Battle of Solachon, when the defeated Persians fled to a nearby hill.³⁶ Once the Persians abandoned their elevated position, the Roman army gave chase. According to Theophylact, in this stage of the engagement over a thousand Persians were taken prisoner.³⁷ The *archon* responsible for the blockade, Stephen, could not have known that the enemy satrap Kardarigan, who had taken refuge on the blocked hill, had used the ensuing confusion to run away, avoiding death or imprisonment. So, on the one hand, Stephen behaved passively by not storming the hill, but on the other hand – he gave the enemy an illusory hope of escape. When the Persians began their retreat, the victorious Roman army immediately pursued and completely routed the surviving enemy soldiers. Dealing with a surrounded opponent will be discussed further, in the meantime it should be pointed out that the Roman commander did the right thing. If the Persians had been desperate, they could have chosen to fight the Romans, assaulting their position; but during flight, carried forward by fear and conformity, they ran, thinking solely of saving their own lives. When Stephen later stood before *strategos* Philippicus, the head commander of Roman forces in the Battle of Solachon, he was actually reprimanded. The *strategos* accused his subordinate of not seizing the opportunity to destroy all Persian forces. Stephen was to reply by paraphrasing *Strategikon*:

I know how to respect victory and at the same time fear the ruthlessness of fate. It holds a scourge for all evil, and does not suffer too ostentatious victories.³⁸

This confirms that Roman commanders, even those positioned lower in army hierarchy, followed the principle set out in *Strategikon* and the maxim itself was known to them.³⁹ So, Stephen used an argument in his dispute with the commander that would have been common knowledge among Roman officers, and that perfectly explained his actions, which were consistent with the unofficial doctrine of the Roman army.⁴⁰

36 On the blockade around the Persian position: Sym. 2. 4. 12–14. On the breaking of the blockade: Sym. 2. 4. 14. 2. 5. 3.

37 Sym. 2. 5. 1–3. The clash with the retreating Persians resulted in numerous enemy casualties and taking over a thousand prisoners, who were then sent away to Constantinople.

38 Sym. 2. 5. 2.

39 Or, it was known to Theophylact, who could have fabricated the short *oratio recta*, and attributed it to Stephen.

40 We should be constantly mindful that military treatises were simply guidelines for commanders and were never recognized as official military regulations. Nevertheless, the impact of military literature on the behavior of army leaders could have been greater than is currently believed, as evidenced indirectly by the already mentioned dispute between

Stephen's cautious, even downright conservative attitude in the battle stands completely at odds with the actions of leaders in charge of the two Roman flanks, Eliphredas and Vitalius, who immediately after driving back the Persian cavalry began a very aggressive pursuit. The forces under Vitalius, practically breathing down the necks of the running Persians, reached the enemy camp and took it by storm, whereas the units led by Eiliphredas continued their pursuit all the way to the walls of the city-stronghold Daras.⁴¹ The three radically different actions of Roman commanders in the course of the same battle, but in its different stages, perfectly encapsulate the number of problems that an army leader faced after besting the enemy in the field. It is an interesting fact that none of the three mentioned officers had command over the whole army, so we may assume that their behavior was simply them seizing the initiative and attempting to fully capitalize on the success achieved in combat. Ceding a portion of overall command to lower-ranking commanders and allowing them to make decisions based on direct observation of the battlefield and contact with the enemy was a characteristic feature of clashes in Late Antiquity, especially if the Roman army comprised a large number of cavalry.⁴² The different durations of pursuit and different approaches to it after the conclusion of the engagement were also the result of studying human nature. Eiliphredas and Vitalius followed the Persian cavalry retreating from combat. In essence, their actions exploited the panic that broke out among enemy ranks and forced the Persians to flee from the battlefield. The Romans used this situation to their own advantage, deciding that if their opponents are pursued by an organized force, they will not be able to reform and get back into the fight. It should be pointed out that in this period the Romans already had experience in battling the nomads, who could disengage after being defeated, reform their army and continue fighting the next day. A good example, as we have already established, would be the Battle of Adrianople (586 or 587) during the reign of Emperor Maurice, when the victorious Droxton elected not to pursue the enemy, most likely expecting an ambush.⁴³ This also explains the Avar army in 599 constantly returning to re-engage the Romans in spite of suffering

Stephen and *strategos* Philippicus (on the other hand, we may also claim that the impact was negligible – this thesis can just as well be corroborated by source materials).

41 Sym. 2. 4. 1–5.

42 The importance of mounted units during pursuit in the times of the professional imperial army was highlighted in: Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army*, 166. See also, a crucial piece: Richardot, *La fin de l'armée Romaine*, 271–280 and on the subject of the crisis of infantry formations: 287–302. And another classic work: Dixon, Southern, *The Roman Cavalry*, 135–147.

43 Sym. 2. 17.

one defeat after another. Despite its victories, the Roman army led by Priscus and Comentiolus was unable to stage a pursuit and rout the Avars completely. This allowed the nomads to disengage time and time again and retain their combat effectiveness.⁴⁴ By aggressively pursuing the enemy, Romans were able to effectively eliminate a large portion of the opposing army, simply by killing as many soldiers as possible⁴⁵ and forcing the rest to flee in panic. After a pursuit like that, the surviving soldiers lost their combat effectiveness, and a lot of time and effort on the part of the commanders was needed to restore the effectiveness of such defeated and decimated units.

In any case, victory should be capitalized upon to the best of one's ability, so that the retreating or fleeing enemy suffered as heavy losses as possible.⁴⁶ Pursuit was necessary⁴⁷ to destroy the opponent's manpower, otherwise victory in combat became pointless, since the other side could still fight on. This is what happened repeatedly during various conflicts with the nomads, who were masters at disengaging from the fight and carrying out a planned retreat.⁴⁸ According to the author of *Strategikon*, pursuit should not be limited to a small area in the immediate vicinity of the concluded battle. Roman troops were not to give the enemy a moment of respite and push forward to eliminate as many combatants as possible.⁴⁹ This aggressive approach was directed both against the opponent's manpower, which should be destroyed

44 Sym. 7. 2. 1–4.1; Curta, “Avar Blitzkrieg, Slavic and Bulgar raiders, and Roman Special Ops,” 69–89.

45 Although it should be mentioned that a portion of the Persian force did not run away but regrouped towards the center and continued to fight.

46 See an excellent study for Classical Greece: Konijnendijk, *Classical Greek Tactics A Cultural History*, 178–188. Interestingly, in the Greek world chase was often given and led to real carnage of those pursued; see particularly 189–191.

47 *Strategikon* even includes a provision of cavalry regulations regarding organization of pursuit: *pugnās sive seques inimicum sive aequalis facies, nom forte minaret ut ne sparges tu suum ordinem. (During combat, pursuit or when positioned in the first line, do not charge too far ahead, for you may disrupt the formation.)* Strat. 3. 5. 3–9. This Latin text was written in Greek letters and was either part of Roman army regulations or of another treatise. Rance suggests that the author of *Strategikon* translated whole passages from Latin and compiled them in his own treatise. Rance, “Simulacra Pugnae,” 233.

48 Gergely Csiky, *Avar-Age Polearms and Edged Weapons Classification, Typology, Chronology and Technology* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 391–400 and David A. Graff, *The Eurasian Way of War: Military Practice in Seventh-Century China and Byzantium (Asian States and Empires)* (London: Routledge, 2016), 153–176, and also: Curta, “Avar Blitzkrieg, Slavic and Bulgar Raiders, and Roman Special Ops,” 69–89. Avar warfare also had an immense impact on the Roman art of war: Szadeczky-Kardoss, “Der awarisch-türkische Einfluss auf die byzantinische Kriegskunst um 600”. And the latest book whose author slightly diminishes the impact of Avar warfare on the development of Roman cavalry: Kardaras, *Byzantium and the Avars*, 156–176.

49 Strat. 7. 12.

completely if possible, but also against the morale of whoever was left.⁵⁰ An army beaten in the field and later scattered in retreat ceased to have any military value and required extensive reorganization before it could once again be combat-ready. A well-led pursuit stoked the panic caused by being defeated in battle. Due to the fleeing force being completely demoralized, there was relatively little for the pursuers to fear in this situation.

An excellent example of exploiting the panic within enemy ranks was the Battle of Argentoratum in 357, where Caesar Julian faced a coalition of barbarians led by Chnodomar. After a long struggle, the Romans managed to break their opponents' defense and forced them to retreat towards a river.⁵¹ When the overall commander of the barbarians, Chnodomar, turned and ran, the whole army followed suit. Ammianus Marcellinus left behind a description of the panicked flight of the Alemanni and their allies, and how the Romans reacted to this:

Eventually, the barbarians that were in gravest danger, oblivious to the piles of bodies rising before them, found their salvation in the flight across the river that was at their back ... Our own forces, although weighed down by equipment, pursued the enemy without pause. Some of the barbarians, confident in their swimming skills, likely believed they could escape danger and entrusted their fate to the waves. Caesar, whose swift mind foresaw the possible outcome, gathered the tribunes and unit leaders and with chiding words prohibited our soldiers, too eager in their pursuit, from throwing themselves into the river as well. So, we only ensured that it was possible to strike at the Germani from the banks with all manner of projectiles ... The frothing water, colored red with barbarian blood, rose unusually high to the surprise of all.⁵²

50 In the 10th century, pursuits had a different course. Some treatises replaced this aggressive approach with more moderate, even defensive behavior. This was, of course, related to the threat of ambushes being set up by the retreating troops. Fearful of ambushes, or of getting dragged into an out-of-control pursuit, Roman commanders made good use of reconnaissance units when giving chase, manning any ravines they passed to secure their rear in case of being caught in an ambush. *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 51. 1–2; *De velitatione bellica*, 23.

51 The start of the battle did not bode well at all, especially after the failure of the initial heavy cavalry charge. The psychological aspect of this event, and Julian's reaction, was analyzed in: Piotr Letki, "Catafractarios ducens mortuus est, czyli odwrót elity z pola walki. Nieudana szarża ciężkozbrojnej jazdy rzymskiej pod Argentoratum," in *Psychologia boju na przestrzeni dziejów. Człowiek w doświadczeniu granicznym*, ed. Michał Stachura (Kraków: Historia Iagellonica, 2017), 19–29.

52 Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 16. 52.

Julian's actions were as if taken straight out of a Roman military manual. After breaking the enemy line, the Romans began a violent pursuit, difficult to manage by the officers. The desperate barbarians who reached the river decided to swim across, seeing their only hope of survival in reaching the territory of *Barbaricum*. Julian, aware of the bellicose attitude of his men and the emotions that drove them, prohibited the pursuers from entering the river, being content with shooting at the swimming enemies. This decision was based on two factors. First of all, as noted by Ammianus himself, Roman armor was heavy; and soldiers, exhausted by combat and pursuit, could very well disregard their safety while slaying enemies in the river and drown as a result. When chasing after a fleeing opponent, soldiers were overwhelmed by base emotions, they stopped controlling themselves or even considering their own safety! The need to release stress and punish the enemy responsible for causing it directly was stronger than any training. The second reason for Julian's decision was that an enemy force unable to retreat, with the only path to safety blocked by a river, could very well turn and rejoin the fight, the soldiers deciding to sell their lives dearly and making a last stand. By deciding to only employ projectile weapons, Julian all but encouraged the Alemanni to continue their panicked retreat and cling to the hope of escaping the Romans in the swift current of the river. As mentioned by Ammianus, the water ran red with barbarian blood, which means that in the end very few enemies reached the other bank safely.⁵³

Romans would always attempt to pursue in an organized fashion, predicting that they might encounter ambushes set by the retreating force, as this was what Romans would do themselves if the situation had been reversed.⁵⁴ In theory, when chasing the enemy the Roman army did not disperse, as specified in one of the military maxims:

After a victorious clash, the commander that disperses his forces in order to give chase, hands the victory back to the enemy.⁵⁵

53 Even if this is a description based on ancient traditions, it still allows us to draw interesting conclusions. After all, we are only interested in the social mechanism described by Ammianus and its functioning.

54 As an example, let us consider the traps that Syrianus advised to be set for any enemies following the Roman force. Syrianus, 38.

55 Strat. 8B. 11.

The cavalry conducting the pursuit (διώκω) could not do so in a disorganized, scattered (διασπείρω)⁵⁶ formation, as this might have tragic consequences. Later in the section that warns commanders against possible traps laid by a pursued enemy, the author of *Strategikon* emphasized that the retreat (ἀναχώρησις) may have been staged and acts of kindness (φιλανθρωπία)⁵⁷ may be dishonest. The author of *Strategikon* does describe methods of safely staging a pursuit, making extensive use of Arrian's *Acies contra Alanos*. Notably, the text of the treatise was adjusted to the reality of the 6th century and the wars with the Avars.⁵⁸ A Roman army leader was to be always prepared for surprises from the enemy, and to expect an ambush even if his army had won the engagement. Any opponent, especially one with inferior training and equipment, could try to gain an advantage over the Romans by using tricks and ruses.

Do not let yourself be misled by the enemy's acts of kindness or retreat attempts.⁵⁹

The Roman army of Late Antiquity operated based on certain fixed tactical schemata.⁶⁰ It was a professional force, meaning that soldiers could be prepared for service through training and military drills.⁶¹ Even something inherently chaotic like a pursuit was supposed to be executed in an organized, orderly fashion. This gave the Romans a significant advantage over basically

56 The verb διασπείρω used here can refer to a "scattered" formation but can just as well mean "disorganized". See, e.g.: αὐτοχειρίῃ διέσπειρε τῇ στρατιῇ. Herodotus, *Historiae*, 3. 13.

57 Also, benevolence, human decency. See, e.g.: Μακεδόνες μὲν γὰρ ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων πολλῶν καὶ μεγάλων ἐτετεύχισαν φιλανθρωπιῶν, κοινῇ μὲν πάντες ἀπολυθέντες μοναρχικῶν ἐπιταγμάτων ... Polybios, 36.17.13.

58 See an ample comparison in the excellent text by Rance, "Maurice's *Strategikon* and 'the Ancients,'" 243–251. Philip Rance presented in detail the procedure of repelling enemy cavalry and a successful pursuit, pinpointing that, in the narration of Arrian as well as the author of *Strategikon*, the soldiers' morale played an important role. Rance, "Maurice's *Strategikon* and 'the Ancients,'" 245.

59 Strat. 8A. 23.

60 Military manuals, especially such as *Strategikon* and its continuations, were supposed to allow beginner commanders to learn these patterns of behavior. Operating according to tactical schemata did not mean that the Roman army was predictable. Suggestions included in *Strategikon* allowed for a significant level of improvisation but within the borders of a fixed system known perfectly by both the soldiers and their superiors. See: Różycki, *Mauriciū Strategicon*, 19–34; 44–75.

61 Similarly to modern armies, military training is aimed at blocking physical as well as mental factors that might negatively affect soldiers in combat. See: Judith Orasanu and Patricia M. Backer. "Stress and military performance," in *Series in applied psychology. Stress and human performance*, ed. James E. Driskell and Eduardo Salas (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996), 89–125.

any other army of the known world.⁶² As noted by the author of *Strategikon*, chasing after an enemy without maintaining unit cohesion usually meant handing (in this case προδίδωμι)⁶³ victory back to that enemy. In the Roman army, the pursuit and front-line combat were the domain of the *cursores*, i.e. offensive units.⁶⁴ During combat, it was their task to clash with the enemy and drive them back. During pursuit, the *cursores* also had a purely offensive responsibility; they were to aggressively follow the retreating enemy soldiers. In the Middle Byzantine period, the units leading the pursuit (in this case the *scholarioi*) could not take captives, collect spoils or loose horses, as they were in charge of the pursuit to the exclusion of anything else.⁶⁵ After the *cursores* marched the defensive units (*defensores*), second-line troops, maintaining perfect tactical formation. If the first line was driven back, it was their job to provide protection for retreating offensive units and to continue the fight. In this way, the *cursores* could focus on the pursuit and not have to worry too much about possible enemy ambushes. If enemy reinforcements or ambushing units appeared, the Roman cavalry retreated towards the safety of the defensive formations following in their trail, which could re-engage the enemy by presenting a properly-formed battle line. The author of *Strategikon* understood that a maneuver like that, i.e. repositioning behind the second line, is inherently risky and that the retreating cavalry could decide not to stop, and by doing so make the defensive units retreat as well.⁶⁶ This is what happened to the Goth cavalry in the Battle of Busta Gallorum; the fleeing riders crashed into the infantry and caused a general panic.⁶⁷ This shows his deep understanding of the human psyche and knowledge about how conformity works in situations of danger. Nevertheless, deploying defensive units to accompany the pursuing force provided tactical flexibility, and in the event that the *cursores* were defeated, this second line could be used to guard the retreat.

62 Although the authors of the military treatises usually claimed that the Roman army was in a state of collapse and a far cry from the efficient military machine of old. See the introductions to the work of Vegetius or *Strategikon*.

63 The use of the term προδίδωμι is significant, since this is a severe admonishment, close to accusing the incompetent commander of treason! Compare: Euripides, *Orestes* 1588. (ὄν σὺ προὔδωκας θανεῖν), or in the political/military context, Herodotus, *Historiae*, 6. 23; 7. 137.

64 *Strat.* 1. 3.

65 *Praecepta militaria*, 4. 14. About the pursuit itself with measures adopted to counteract enemy ambushes or counter-charges see *Praecepta militaria*, 2. 5; 4. 17 and Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, 57. 6; 57. 9.

66 *Strat.* 2. 1.

67 Procopius Caesarensis, *De Bellis*, 8. 32. 17–19. Similarly, John chasing the Vandals all the way to the walls of Carthage. Procopius Caesarensis, *De Bellis*, 3. 18. 4–11.

When pursuing an enemy, the second line followed the first one at a distance of a few bow shots. This tactic was not only a reasonable solution when expecting a trap, it also solved issues related to how the human mind works that we have already covered here. Let us now re-examine the functioning of certain mechanisms and analyze how were they employed by the Romans during pursuit.

In order to even get close to understanding the emotions experienced by soldiers in this situation we need to think back to the battle itself, or even the period before the battle. The overwhelming fear of combat, death or the unknown was discussed in previous chapters, but we need to bear in mind that immediately after the engagement soldiers were still under the influence of these stress factors. The feeling of numbness after a successful clash, caused by the drop in adrenaline levels, could lead to apathy and, consequently, breakdown of discipline and loss of combat effectiveness. This was a serious threat to army morale and such numbed soldiers became almost impossible to motivate, losing all value as a fighting force.

The solution was for the pursuit to immediately follow the battle with no break during which troops could become apathetic. What the Romans did was attempt to use the earlier described mechanism of relieving stress, which was more useful when chasing the enemy than during actual combat. The initial roles became reversed, now it was the Roman soldier that had the advantage and caused fear in the hearts of the fleeing opponents. The terrifying barbarians, who were the direct cause of mental stress before the battle and who during combat were threatening to kill the Roman soldiers, were now running for their lives. In these circumstances an additional component enters the human mind, one which had great significance for what action should be taken after a victory. Soldiers were seething with the desire for revenge, wishing to release some of the pent-up stress. Those who were the cause of this tension, and who now presented the perfect target to take these emotions out on, were running away from the battlefield, dropping their weapons as they went.⁶⁸ Obviously, the Romans would give chase even if the commanders were trying to manage their subordinates and maintain tactical discipline.⁶⁹ The units of *cursores*, active in the first stage of the battle, would now pursue the retreating force and the Romans could finally relieve their stress by dispatching the direct cause

68 Compare this to the description of pursuit after the Battle of Busta Gallorum, where the Romans encountered no resistance from the fleeing Goths and ended up killing a total of six thousand barbarian warriors. Procopius Caesarensis, *De Bellis*, 8. 32. 16–20.

69 Like for example Julian, whose strict tone stopped his pursuing troops from throwing themselves into a river while fully armored. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 16. 12. 55.

of their mental and physical suffering – the enemy soldiers. In these circumstances forming the pursuing party into two detachments seems the best possible solution. First came the offensive units, executing an aggressive, albeit rather disorganized pursuit. Then, at a bowshot's distance or slightly further, there was the defensive formation, whose soldiers did not directly participate in combat, so their bloodlust was not as high. This allowed the *strategos* to have all the benefits of a regular pursuit, which was then supported by tactically ordered units, ready to repel the enemy force should it decide to turn back and fight again. The Romans prevented their opponents from disengaging by pressing their advantage, while the well-ordered second line minimized the risk of counterattack and protected the pursuing cavalry if it happened.

This particular two-line setup of the Roman army was extremely useful, especially when following nomads. The enemy tactics were simple – lure the Romans into pursuit, make them overextend their formation, then turn around and assault their unsuspecting, dispersed forces. In the case of a counterattack like that, Roman soldiers would be subjected to completely new stressors. Men blinded by lust for revenge were suddenly attacked by barbarians, who once again inspired fear, even more so since the Roman line was disrupted. Being subjected to so many intense emotions in a short span of time must have caused at least some of the pursuers to abandon their task and turn to flight themselves. Counterattacking while retreating was a tactical maneuver that the barbarians employed frequently, and in time it was also adopted by the Romans.⁷⁰ Good commanders knew well that forcing the nomads to retreat did not mean victory in battle; the Romans still needed to maintain tactical discipline and remain extremely cautious. The pursuing units of *cursores* could not have retained order for the understandable reasons described above. Chasing after an enemy is a chaotic endeavor, and maintaining a cohesive formation significantly reduces unit speed, which was the main advantage in this last stage of the battle – especially if one was pursuing a mounted force. In this approach the *cursores* executed a traditional disorganized pursuit, spreading out their formation and venting their frustration at the same time. If the enemy attacked the scattered Roman units, they would retreat to the safety

70 For example, Theophylact noted the following about a clash with the Avars in 586: ἐπιπλάστῳ γὰρ φυγῇ τὸ ἐκείνου κέρας ἔδοξε τοῖς πολεμίοις τὰ νῶτα παρέχεσθαι, ὡς οἷα δεδοικότες τοῦ Ῥωμαϊκοῦ τὸ ἀντίπαλον· εἶτα τοῦμπαλιν ἀντεδίωξε καὶ μετόπισθε τῶν βαρβάρων γενόμενον τοὺς συντυχόντας διώλεσεν. *During combat, the army wing under his (Drocton's) command showed their backs to the enemy in mock-retreat, making it seem as though the Romans feared their opponents. He then turned around, dispatched the pursuing force and, making his way to the rear of the barbarian formation, slew anyone in his path.* Sym. 2. 17. 11.

of the second line that followed them in an ordered tactical formation.⁷¹ So, even if the nomads managed to rout the offensive detachment of the pursuit, they would be met by the battle-ready and well-prepared line of *defensores*. Additionally, by counterattacking the *cursores*, the nomads would have also disrupted their own formation and would rush directly into the defensive detachment completely unprepared. By using this mixed formation of assaulting and defending units, the Roman army found a way to deal with the nomads' signature stratagem. The barbarian countercharge, not equipped for another pitched battle, was blocked by *defensores*, who maintained discipline and a tight formation. Then, another counterattack would be executed, this time by the Roman cavalry, with the difference being that the nomads did not have any second-line troops to protect them.⁷² These maneuvers during successive stages of pursuit immediately bring into mind the poetic comparison of the author of *Strategikon* to the waves on the sea, drawing closer and receding in a fluid pattern. In the actual final stage of the battle (once the counterattacking barbarians had already been beaten by *defensores*), Romans could pursue the enemy force with little else to fear.

In the Middle Byzantine period, the tradition of luring the enemy into a pursuit was continued, although one component was added; the multi-stage ambush, in which the nomads excelled.⁷³ The Seljuks would divide their forces into three detachments; one of these engaged the enemy, whereas the other two waited in two separate ambushes. The first section then broke away from the fight, causing the opponent's formation to scatter, and counter-charged together with one of the ambushing detachments. If this was not enough to rout the enemy, the combined nomad force once again retreated and repeated the maneuver this time supported by the third detachment lying in wait.⁷⁴ Roman commanders knew these stratagems well, and yet often were unable to avoid falling for them. During the battle of Manzikert, Basilakios's unit was

71 Strat. 2. 1.

72 Strat. 11. 2.

73 This stratagem was actually used against the Roman cavalry at Manzikert. Bryennios, 1. 17. For the way in which the Romans effectively used the multi-stage ambush, see, for example, the fighting with the Pechenegs near Arcadiopolis in 970 see Skylitzes, 288–291.

74 Walter Emil Kaegi, "The Contribution of the Archery to the Turkish Conquest of Anatolia," *Speculum* 39 (1964): 96–108; Alfred Friendly, *The Dreadful Day. The Battle of the Manzikert 1071* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1981); Nicolas Zbinden, *Abendländische Ritter, Griechen und Türken im Ersten Kreuzzug. (Zur Problematik ihrer Begegnung)* (Athens: Verlag der Byzantinisch-Neugriechischen Jahrbücher, 1975); Raymond Charles Smail, *Crusading Warfare, 1097–1193* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 75–83; John France, *Victory in the East: A Military History of the First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 147–150.

destroyed in such an ambush.⁷⁵ The Roman commander was certain that he was dealing with a small unit of Turks and decided to pursue them, dispersing his troops and allowing them to be unexpectedly counterattacked in turn. It also bears repeating that the tactic of staging a retreat was known to the Romans, since they made use of it themselves. In the 10th century, when the Romans were fighting against Svyatoslav, in one battle the Rus' selected a very advantageous position: they were shielded by a forest on one side and marshes on the other. The massed Roman troops could not extend their formation or bring all of their assets to bear. When the fighting started, Phokas ordered his soldiers to retreat towards a plain where the Roman heavy cavalry had better room for maneuvering. The Rus' took the bait, convinced that the Romans were truly retreating, and gave chase, abandoning their secure position.⁷⁶ The stratagem was successful – the Roman cavalry turned around and attacked the disorganized enemy troops, forcing them to fight on the defensive.⁷⁷ In the 11th century, a single event that encapsulates the problems with the quality of soldiers and their inability to follow tactical schemata is Aruandanos's attempt at luring the Seljuks into pursuit, which resulted in actual flight of Byzantine troops.⁷⁸ This took place near the Oshen stronghold during fights between Romans and Turks, the latter commanded by Gümüshtigin. The opponents were evenly matched but when the Roman commander, Aruandanos, decided to stage a mock-retreat to force the Turks into a disorganized pursuit, the Roman formation fell apart. A retreat, intended to lure the enemy into an ambush, turned into a panicked flight of the Roman army. This demonstrates the complexity of such maneuvers, and the necessary discipline and psychological resilience of the soldiers involved.

If the enemy army had been routed, there was one other possibility to take into account – opponents could seek the shelter of a fortified position or hide behind the walls of nearby cities or forts. If they did that, the first thing to do in response was to cut off all ways of provisioning men and beasts, then surround the fortifications and force the enemy to surrender.⁷⁹ However, if the enemy had been surrounded on the battlefield, without any possibility of retreat, the situation was different altogether.

75 Bryennios, 1. 14; Attaleiates, 155; Scylitzes Continuatus, 5. 10.

76 Skylitzes, 306–307.

77 Skylitzes, 307. However, the maneuver did not affect the result of the battle.

78 Matthew of Edessa, 2. 49.

79 Strat. 7. 12.

3 Envelopment

Surrounding the enemy forced the victorious commander to consider entirely different problems than in the case of pursuit or siege.⁸⁰ Contrary to what one might think, such situations must have happened quite often, since the tactics of Roman armies in Late Antiquity were focused on swift flanking actions and enveloping maneuvers.⁸¹ The main objective for the *cursores* was to defeat the enemy on both flanks, then execute a pincer maneuver⁸² to completely surround the forces remaining on the battlefield. These offensive units were supported by several ambushing *bandons* of cavalry, whose task was to strike at the enemy's rear and close the gap. The ideal situation would be to leave the enemy an opportunity for retreat, then give chase, but sometimes the blockade was so tight that the opposing force had no room left to maneuver. Situations like that posed a certain risk, which should be countered. As noted by Vegetius:

One who does not have extensive knowledge about warcraft may think that achieving true victory means surrounding the enemy in some ravine or enveloping them with our own forces so securely that none may escape. Meanwhile, those who suddenly see themselves trapped will be empowered by despair, and the fear and loss of all hope will make them raise their weapons. A soldier knowing that he is about to die will want to sell his life dearly. This is why Scipio's maxim: "Give your adversary a way out", is so widely acknowledged. Verily, once the entrapped enemies notice a way of retreat between our ranks, their minds will be completely fixed on trying to escape, and they will let themselves be slaughtered like cattle. It is then safe to pursue, because the enemy soldiers, overwhelmed by their defeat, drop the weapons they could use to defend themselves. And the larger the number of armed men, the easier it is for them to panic. Even their numbers will not avail them, since once soldiers have been gripped by fear, they will continue running not only from missiles, but at the mere sight of the enemy.⁸³

80 Frontinus devoted a separate paragraph to the subject. See: Frontinus, 2. 6. particularly 2. 6. 2. where the example of Titus Marcus perfectly illustrates the typical Roman treatment of an enveloped force. The eques was to deliberately move his maniples apart, so that the Carthaginians could break out; then, the Romans successfully pursued their opponents and slaughtered them to a man.

81 Różycki, *Mauricii Strategicon*, 44–60; Syväne, *The Age of Hippotoxotai*, 129–131.

82 Veg. 2. 16; Strat. 2. 4. 2–5.

83 Veg. 3. 21.

And, in a similar tone, the author of *Strategikon*:

Once the enemy has been surrounded, you should retain a gap between our forces, so that the opponents are not deprived of the possibility of retreat. An enemy that has nowhere to run to may elect to fight instead.⁸⁴

Roman soldiers knew well that a surrounded enemy, deprived of a way out, may become desperate and decide to fight to the last man.⁸⁵ The conformity that drove soldiers up to that point was replaced with despair combined with grim determination,⁸⁶ which could make a retreating army stand their ground and rejoin the fight, seeing no other solution.⁸⁷ Soldiers who believed that their fate was sealed, became bold to the point of madness (*audacia*).⁸⁸ If this was the case, the encircling side would have taken massive casualties, even risking the outcome of the whole battle. Syrianus Magister had similar things to say on the subject. He warned his readers that even if you outnumber the enemy two-to-one, it is imperative not to completely surround the opposing force.⁸⁹ His reasoning was precisely the same – an encircled opponent with no possibility of escape will desperately fight on to their very last breath. The author of *Strategikon*, being an experienced practitioner, was aware of these risks and suggested a simple solution. Even if the enemy was surrounded on all sides, they should be given an illusion of salvation in the form of a gap between Roman lines, through which some might attempt to break free from the trap. Leaving a way out was to make the opponents focus entirely on trying

84 Strat. 8. 2. 92.

85 Even barbarian leaders were aware of this. See the actions of Totila regarding the Roman garrison of Rome. Procopius Caesarensis, *De Bellis*, 7. 36. 24–25.

86 John Edward Bentley, *General Psychology: Principles and Practice* (Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, 1947), 336. See also: Anthony Mawson, “Understanding Mass Panic and Other Collective Responses to Threat and Disaster,” *Psychiatry* 68 (2005): 95–113.

87 Possibly this is why at Strassbourg Julian prohibited his forces from following the barbarians into the river, afraid that without a way out the Alemanni will once again stand and fight. Though according to Ammianus, the emperor was simply afraid that in the heat of the moment soldiers will throw themselves into the current and some of them might drown. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 16. 12. 55.

88 It is worth noting that *audacia* understood as courage not always has positive connotations, often meaning courage coupled with stupidity or in fact foolhardiness. See: *Rogas me? o hominis impudentem audaciam!* Plautus, *Menaechmi*, 5. 1. or in a positive sense, in war: *duabus his artibus, audacia in bello, ubi pax evenerat aequitate, seque remque publicam curabant.* *De coniuratione Catilinae*, 9. 3.

89 Syrianus, 34. 15–16.

to flee.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, the Romans could eliminate the desperately retreating enemies virtually unopposed.

A trapped soldier with no prospect of escape had only two alternatives: fight to the death, or hide. In the case of being enveloped by an enemy force, the only relatively safe space was the one located as far away as possible from the enemy troops and their murderous weapons. This naturally caused the formation to tighten towards the center (due to conformity as well as crowd panic),⁹¹ which in turn made it impossible to mount an effective defence. In the most extreme cases, as at the Battle of Cannae,⁹² soldiers were so crowded towards the center of their formation that they were unable to even lift up their swords.

Once again we see the Roman commanders use conformity as a weapon. Fleeing enemy soldiers, seeing their chance of escape, were ready to stampede over one another just to get to safety. In these circumstances all attempts at an organized defence were futile. Even if a portion of the army intended to fight on, it would have been swept away by the wave of those rushing to escape, destroying any chance at continuing the battle on equal terms. This made the job of the victorious side that much easier, as the enemy was thinking only about fleeing, not fighting. The desire to save one's life became the primary focus, and the panicked soldiers were driven by a blind, egoistic instinct. Even if some of the enemy units managed to break through the blockade, it was still possible to pursue these demoralized and scattered forces without the threat of them staging an ambush. So, the main objective of the envelopment maneuver was not to eliminate all the enemy soldiers locked within the ring of Roman troops, but rather convince the other side that salvation was within their grasp, if only they ran as fast as their legs could carry them, abandoning all their former comrades.

The Romans deliberately left this way out – the gap in the wall of surrounding forces, to drive away all thoughts of resistance and to compound the panic within enemy ranks. It is difficult to truly understand the mindset of a soldier

90 Once, when Iphicrates trapped an enemy force in a ravine without a way out, he decided to avoid confrontation, knowing that they would fight bravely having no means of retreat. Polyaeus, 3, 9. 14.

91 Specialist simulations have been performed that confirm certain patterns of human behavior in critical situations, during crowd panic. Every time, the mass of people would flee away from the threat (even if this meant moving towards the center of the crowd), which in some analyzed cases resulted in the death of 48% of the simulated group. See more in: Akopov, Beklaryan, "Simulation of human crowd behavior in extreme situations," 121–138.

92 See Sabin, "The Face of Roman Battle," 4–7; Martin Samuels, "The reality of Cannae," *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 1/90 (1990): 1–35.

who found himself in a deadly trap. But surely, he would do anything to get out, including trampling over his fellow soldiers.⁹³ However, this did not prevent acts of extraordinary courage to occur even during a panicked retreat. In 1065, fighting with the Turks near Edessa, the Roman army was forced to flee in panic from the battlefield. During the chaotic retreat, two Armenian infantrymen blocked a bridge to put a stop to the Seljuk pursuit. Then a lone Frank charged at the enemy to give his companions time to retreat.⁹⁴ These were acts of outstanding courage and devotion, especially as fleeing soldiers would normally be opportunistic and thus unlikely to display any initiative.⁹⁵

Another reaction to being surrounded is to seek safety beyond the reach of enemy weapons. This causes soldiers to instinctively crowd together towards the seemingly safer center of the enveloped force. The assumption was that those in the middle of the trap would be safe from harm, but in reality it caused everybody in the center to be squeezed tighter and tighter together by the influx of men from the sides of the formation. In the republican period, Romans personally experienced this during one of the best-known clashes of Antiquity – at Cannae.⁹⁶ Hannibal's forces defeated the Romans on the flanks and managed to completely encircle their enemy, thus executing one of the largest-scale battlefield envelopment maneuvers in ancient history. The Roman legionnaires escaping the threat of Carthaginian swords backed away to the center of their formation, turning it into a huge press of bodies. This only made it easier for Hannibal's troops to massacre the basically defenseless Romans.

In Late Antiquity, Roman commanders understood the importance of surrounding the enemy center and eliminating their manpower. But such envelopment maneuvers as the one at Cannae did not happen frequently, and the risk of the trapped enemy getting back into the fight with no alternative made the Romans prefer to always leave a possible escape route. A retreating force could easily be crushed during a pursuit, especially in the 5th and 6th century,

93 Compare crowd panic in enclosed spaces. John Drury, David Novelli and Clifford Stott. "Representing crowd behaviour in emergency planning guidance: 'mass panic' or collective resilience?," *Resilience* 1/1 (2013): 18–37; Neil Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behaviour* (London: Quid Pro, 1962); Alfred Strauss, "The Literature on Panic," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 39 (1944): 317–28; Jonathan D. Sime, "The Concept of 'Panic,'" in *Fires and Human Behaviour*, ed. David V. Canter (London: Wiley, 1990), 63–81; or the already mentioned, excellent study of mass panic: Mawson, "Understanding Mass Panic," 95–113.

94 Matthew of Edessa, 2. 28.

95 Mawson, "Understanding Mass Panic," 95–113.

96 See an outstanding study of the battle: Gregory Daly, *Cannae: The Experience of Battle in the Second Punic War* (London – New York: Routledge, 2003).

when the ratio of cavalry to infantry in Roman armies was increasing.⁹⁷ As a result, it was easier for them to first dispatch the surrounded forces, and later stage a pursuit after any that ran away.⁹⁸

All this sheds interesting light on the actions of the Roman *archon* Stephen, who during the Battle of Solachon in 586 was ordered to block the escape of a Persian unit that found shelter on a nearby hill. After several days, Stephen's troops allowed the enemy to escape. When Stephen later stood before the overall commander, Philippicus, he explained that the decision to leave a section of the blockade unguarded was deliberate. In his opinion, the fate of the battle still hung in the balance, and Persians, with their determination, could turn it in their favor.⁹⁹ This attitude was nothing exceptional, and in certain cases the author of *Strategikon* outright suggested a similar course of action. According to Stephen, the surrounded enemies could grow desperate, and the knowledge that they would not escape with their lives might make them all the more determined in combat. This is why they should be presented with a false hope of escape.¹⁰⁰ Stephen's words were as if taken straight out of a military manual.¹⁰¹ It is easier to deal with terrified scattered groups running for their lives than with a desperate force ready to fight to the last. In the end, Romans led by the *archon* did exactly as instructed in military manuals, scattering a portion of the Persian army in pursuit. Stephen's decision, based on the information that he possessed, was the correct one, consistent with Roman military doctrine. But one thing that the *archon* could not have predicted, was the escape of the Persian satrap, who was sheltered among the forces surrounded on the hill, and would later have a significant impact on the course of the entire campaign.

Strategos Philippicus,¹⁰² who reprimanded Stephen for his behavior on the battlefield and his lack of aggressive action, seems to have been an advocate

97 Richardot, *La fin de l'armée Romaine*, 271–274; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World*, 67–71; The issue of changes in the number of cavalry compared to infantry in the initial years of the Dominate is described in: Piotr Letki, *The Cavalry of Diocletian Origin. Organization Tactics Weapons* (Oświęcim: Napoleon v, 2012).

98 Similar recommendations are found in *Sylloge Tacticorum*; they accompany a description of a night attack on an enemy camp. The author recommended surrounding a camp from three sides and letting the enemy flee. *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 48. 2.

99 Sym. 2. 5. 2.

100 Strat. 8B. 92. and Strat. 8B. 12.

101 An excellent language analysis of the origin of the phrase *νίκα καὶ μὴ ὑπερνίκα* in Rance, "Win but do not overwin," 191–204.

102 At this point it might be good to re-examine the thesis of J. Witte, who suggested that Philippicus might have potentially been the author of the treatise. If that were so, the general's actions regarding the blocking of the Persian forces were inconsistent with what

of the attitude proposed in chapter 12, book VII of *Strategikon*,¹⁰³ which dealt with what a *strategos* should do after a victorious battle:

If the outcome of the battle is successful, one should not be content merely with driving the enemy back. It is a mistake made by inexperienced commanders, who do not know how to capitalize on this opportunity and like the sound of the phrase “Win but do not overwin”. By not exploiting this opportunity, such commanders put themselves in a troublesome spot and risk squandering their prior success. You should not rest until the enemy is completely destroyed. If they hide behind fortifications, press your advantage either directly by force of arms or by preventing them from gathering provisions for men and mounts, until either they are all dead, or forced to sign a treaty that is favorable for us. Taking into consideration all the risks of warfare, you should not stop at pushing the enemy back a short distance, you should not risk victory in the campaign through lack of determination. In war, just like during a hunt, a near-miss is still a miss.¹⁰⁴

This is a more aggressive stance than that previously discussed. The author suggests taking an offensive approach in order to completely eliminate the enemy’s manpower. This was directly tied to the established military doctrine. A true victory was not achieved by holding the battlefield and driving back the enemy (here, in an interesting context, the author uses the verb ἀρκέω);¹⁰⁵ it was by making the enemy unable to continue the fight. This is why after the battle the Romans were advised to mount an aggressive and determined (καρτερία) pursuit, with the goal to further demoralize the retreating force and kill as many of the practically defenseless enemy soldiers as possible. What is more, the author of *Strategikon* was a fierce opponent of the phrase νίκα καὶ μὴ ὑπερνίκα.¹⁰⁶ In the case of this offensive approach, it should be stated that, in theory, Romans did not give their opponent even a moment to recover or

the treatise suggested. Obviously, this is not an argument that disqualifies Philippicus as the possible author, yet on several occasions throughout the campaign his behavior was completely at odds with some of the most crucial tenets of *Strategikon*.

103 During a pursuit following a retreat, a large portion of enemy soldiers could escape; destroying the opposing army while it was still surrounded was more certain and more effective, but also more costly.

104 Strat. 7. 12. 2–13.

105 Repel, deny.

106 Rance, “Win but do not overwin,” 192.

reorganize, incessantly pressing forward to complete victory.¹⁰⁷ With each passing moment of this ceaseless pursuit the morale of the enemy force would further plummet, and panic would be compounded to a point where the defeated army stopped forming a coherent tactical unit, devolving into a disorganized group of terrified men looking out only for themselves.

4 General Remarks

As has already been mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the army leader's role after a military engagement did not diminish. Victory in battle did not mean an end to the campaign, and success itself could become a demoralizing factor for an army.

One of the methodological problems when writing a work like this is the lack of empirical data. It is difficult for a modern person to imagine the stress of waiting before a battle or the emotions that accompany fighting an opponent face to face. The compounded stress factors and negative emotions must have been overwhelming, and victory, both in theory and according to normal human expectations, should mean safety and rest. A soldier going into combat assumes that should he win, he will be able to relax and feel secure. This causes euphoria related to the removal of external stressors. In the minds of the soldiers, what follows after the battle is time for recovery, certainly not another challenge, like pursuing the enemy or preparing to repel yet another attack. In the extreme circumstances of hand-to-hand combat, the human body, subjected to acute stress factors, reacts similarly for all. After experiencing severe stress and fear, the soldiers, convinced of their success, become apathetic, stop looking out for their safety and instead look for ways to relieve the negative emotions or to relax.¹⁰⁸ Adopting this attitude in the vicinity of an enemy force, even a defeated and retreating one, could have catastrophic consequences for an entire army. Surprisingly enough, all this was known to Roman commanders, although the mental processes in place were never identified or defined by them. Their knowledge of human behavior came from direct, post-battle

107 The influence of these factors, but on a much longer scale, was described by Lord Moran in the context of World War I. He noted that the longer a man is subjected to stress, and the shorter the periods of being outside of combat are, the more likely it is for a nervous breakdown to occur. See: Wilson, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 75–84.

108 The most basic example would be what college students do after passing an exam. Most set out in search of a neutral place to relax with friends or go back home to unwind. See also: Kilpatrick, "Problems of Perception in Extreme Situations," 20–22.

observations, and was used intuitively. The author of *Strategikon* noted the following:

After a victory, the strategos should not allow soldiers to drop formation immediately. It often happens that the opponents, seeing our soldiers rejoice and break ranks, gather up their courage, turn back and turn our victory into defeat.¹⁰⁹

The quote above clearly indicates that Roman army leaders who read *Strategikon* should be aware of how victorious soldiers reacted after the acute stress of combat. The fragment teaches how to prevent the very direct and immediate mental changes that occur in soldiers after a clash. The loosening of discipline resulting from the removal of extreme stressors had to happen eventually. The treatise indicates that the enemy could exploit this opportunity and turn defeat into victory by recovering their courage (ἀνεθάρσησαν) after retreat (ἀναπίπτω). To prevent that, a Roman *strategos* should keep his troops on the battlefield in a combat-ready state long enough to ensure that the enemy force does not intend to re-engage. Obviously, another solution to this problem was to stage a pursuit, but this was not always feasible or tactically sound; sometimes the Romans had to be content with simply controlling the battlefield. Once the threat of renewing combat was over, the Romans could return behind the walls of their fortified camp and actually relax. The author of *Strategikon* also suggested taking action that would keep soldiers from becoming too complacent. One such method was sending out patrols.¹¹⁰

Having defeated their adversaries in combat, soldiers not only do not expect having to make another effort, like re-engaging the opponent – they are simply not mentally prepared for it. The adrenaline level, previously elevated due to extreme stressors, now drops. This results in a short burst of euphoria, which is followed by apathy¹¹¹ and exhaustion.¹¹² Everyone reacts in a similar manner to prolonged stress and high adrenaline levels.¹¹³ On the other hand – for the defeated side it must have been all the more difficult to return to the battlefield

¹⁰⁹ Strat. 8B. 91.

¹¹⁰ Strat. 7. 12.

¹¹¹ A state of severely decreased sensitivity to physical stimuli. See more in: Dariusz Dolinski and Richard Nawratb, “Fear-then-relief procedure for producing compliance: Beware when the danger is over,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 34/1 (1998): 27–51.

¹¹² The condition was excellently described in: Doliński, Nawart, “Fear-then-relief,” 27–51.

¹¹³ This is why we can observe deepening apathy among soldiers participating in prolonged campaigns. Compare with the armies of Alexander the Great: Gabriel, *The Madness of Alexander the Great*, 67–68.

and once again face the victorious force. But there are situations where late reinforcements enter the field once the battle has all but been resolved, and it is these fresh troops that join the fight.

Sources confirm the validity of the warnings found in *Strategikon* – even the smallest impulse can spark panic among the winners. After the Battle of Solachon, all it took was a rumor about supposed Persian reinforcements readying themselves for combat and the whole Roman camp burst into chaos. Theophylact Simocatta, the author of the most extensive account of these events, noted:

When the sun was setting, there was suddenly disorder in the Roman camp and a rumor spread that the Persians had received large reinforcements and were mounting an attack on the camp.¹¹⁴

This unconfirmed piece of news brought the recovering Roman army to the brink of panic and forced *strategos* Philippicus to take decisive action. Despite there being little chance that the Persians would return to the battlefield, since during their disorganized retreat they had scattered in all directions, so any possibility of rallying their troops was virtually non-existent, the Roman commander still decided to ease the fears of his men by sending out a strong scouting party. And it was not under the command of some low-ranking *archon*, but Philippicus's right hand man – Heraclius the Elder. We can suspect that by doing so, Philippicus demonstrated to his subordinates that on the one hand he was not afraid of the enemy, but he also did not intend to discount even the rumors of possible reinforcements. This must have had the desired effect on the morale of anxious soldiers, especially since the general's second-in-command did not find any traces of the enemy, which he swiftly reported back. Dispatching the patrol was also a way to mobilize the troops and keep at least some of them in combat-readiness. The panic in the Roman camp, however, remains a fact and it is difficult to assess whether the army would have been ready for another pitched battle, if necessary. Later events seem to indicate that the soldiers in the force led by Philippicus and Heraclius were burned out and mentally exhausted after the previous clash. In the course of the campaign on Persian territory, following the Battle of Solachon, the Romans then retreated before a weaker, hastily formed enemy army, not wanting to risk another full-scale battle, and before that they gave up a tactically superior position to the

114 Sym 2. 5. 9–10. This was the day when Stephen reported about the defeat of Persians who held out on the hill, i.e. already after the last vestige of enemy opposition has been dealt with.

Persians without a fight.¹¹⁵ This shows the soldiers' unwillingness to engage the enemy, as they had already fought one battle recently. An account of similar events was given by Corippus, describing Roman behavior after a victorious clash with the Moors. Despite having won, John Troglita dispatched night sentries to ensure the safety of the camp. This was another method of keeping soldiers active and battle-ready.¹¹⁶ In order to make it more effective, the leader promised rich spoils to those on guard duty, which was to significantly improve their spirits.

Another important factor that affected the morale of the entire army was disposing of the bodies of those who fell in battle. This was, of course, related to the Romans' devout faith, but the author of *Strategikon* emphasized the impact that this duty had on remaining soldiers:

After the fight, the commander must look to the wounded and the dead, it is a duty stemming from our faith, which significantly improves the eagerness [*morale*] of the living.¹¹⁷

The author assumed that men would be more willing to fight in future engagements if they knew that in the event of death they would be buried in accordance with the proper religious rites.¹¹⁸ The sight of their commander caring both for the living, as well as for the fallen, enhanced army morale.¹¹⁹ Burials, especially in Roman territory after the fighting was done, were financed from a joint treasury, to which all soldiers of a given unit deposited a portion of their pay.¹²⁰ This fact must have also had a positive impact on the unit's willingness to fight.

¹¹⁵ Sym. 2. 8. 11–9. 14.

¹¹⁶ Johannis 6. 1–6. See also: Bartosz Kołoczek, "Stres pola bitwy, panika i sposoby ich przezwyciężenia w późnoantycznym poemacie epickim Jan, albo o wojnach libijskich Flawiusza Kreskoniusza Koryppusa," in *Psychologia boju na przestrzeni dziejów. Człowiek w doświadczeniu granicznym*, ed. Michał Stachura (Kraków: Historia Iagellonica, 2017), 45–54.

¹¹⁷ Strat. 7B. 6.

¹¹⁸ There is a similarity with *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 50. 7, although it is an absolute priority for keeping up the army's morale.

¹¹⁹ Here, to refer to the army's spirits, the author of *Strategikon* once again uses the word *προθυμία*, which, as we have already established, with a degree of caution could be interpreted as morale.

¹²⁰ Veg. 3. 11.

5 Spoils and the Wounded

Sources from Late Antiquity rarely include information about the distribution of spoils¹²¹ (σκόλα)¹²² or the fate of those wounded in battle. The authors of relevant sources usually limited themselves to emphasizing the importance of victory; they would sometimes mention the spoils of war, but not go into detail on how these were collected from the battlefield or divided among the winners. Military treatises provide the most valuable information about the importance and distribution of loot, and the way of obtaining it.¹²³ And in the context of this study these were important issues with real impact on army morale.¹²⁴ Treasure, especially such that could be won easily,¹²⁵ was often the cause of war, and practically always a motivating factor.¹²⁶ In the latter case, however, we are unable to determine how important it was for the effectiveness of the fighting force,¹²⁷ because loot became a significant issue only once the battle was done,¹²⁸ and the law offers only theoretical answers to any questions.¹²⁹

121 It was no different in the republican period. Information about spoils (*manubiae, praeda* and *spolia*) mainly referred to the commanders. See: Adam Ziółkowski, “Urbs direpta, or how the Romans sacked cities,” in *War and Society in the Roman World*, ed. John Rich and Graham Shipley (New York: Routledge, 1993), 69–91; Jakub Jarych, “Manubiae, praedae i spolia – określenia rzymskiej zdobyczy wojennej,” *Studia Europaea Gnesnensia* 14 (2016): 31–50.

122 Both the loot and armor taken off enemy bodies.

123 Alphonse Dain, “Le Partage du butin de guerre d’après les traités juridiques et militaires,” in *Actes du VI-^e Congrès international d’études byzantines vol. 1*, Paris (1950): 347–354.

124 This was what the renowned Iphicrates knew very well, since he supposedly distributed spoils and rewards according to individual merits. Also, during holidays, he honored the bravest soldiers by sitting them in the front row, close to himself. All this was done to reinforce the spirit of the army and improve morale. Polyaeus, 3. 9. 31.

125 van Wees, *Greek Warfare Myths and Realities*, 26–27.

126 The situation with prisoners of war was slightly different: on one hand, they could be exchanged for an exorbitant ransom. On the other hand, they posed various problems, even of a political nature. More on Arab prisoners in Szymon Wierzbński, “Prospective Gain or Actual Cost? Arab Civilian and Military Captives in the Light of Byzantine Narrative Sources and Military Manuals from the 10th Century,” *Studia Ceranea* 8 (2018): 253–283.

127 Lee, “Morale and the Roman Experience of Battle,” 206. Although we should bear in mind that loot was mentioned in motivational speeches given by army leaders, which indicates that at the very least the *archons* considered it to be an important means of encouragement.

128 Another thing to note here is that ending a single engagement does not equal an end to the whole battle. During the clash at Solachon in 586, the whole flank of Roman cavalry rushed to pillage the Persian camp despite the fact that heavy fighting was still taking place along the battlefield. But, to these soldiers, combat was done, they had done their job and so deserved their rewards. See: Sym. 2. 4. 3–5.

129 Gilliver, “The Roman Army and Morality In War,” 219–219.

Once again we may turn to the invaluable *Strategikon*, which provides suggestions on how to deal with the injured, as well as what is the safest method of gathering spoils from the battlefield without causing chaos and rivalry.

Any captured spoils were important to the Romans, and in the period of the state's financial crisis and less regular pay, this was a welcome addition to a soldier's compensation, or sometimes even its replacement.¹³⁰ The Roman army at the end of the 6th century was heavily under-financed, so spoils could be an important secondary source of income for imperial troops. This also meant that valuables were especially sought-after, which could result in a breakdown of discipline. A case in point would be the discontent of the Roman army in the Balkans in 593, when *strategos* Priscus decided to hand over most of the spoils taken from the Slavs to the emperor and his family.¹³¹ The commander's immediate reaction prevented a dangerous mutiny. It must not be overlooked that spoils (σκόλα) played an equally important role in the Middle Byzantine period, as reflected even in the legislation of the time.¹³²

The Slavs eagerly exploited the Roman lust for treasure, since normally they could not stand toe-to-toe in open battle with the excellently organized and well-equipped Roman forces.¹³³ The barbarians had to come up with ways of gaining an advantage over the regular imperial army. Often they would resort to ambushes, staged retreats or attempts to terrorize the legionnaires and make them flee without a fight. In battle, the barbarians first tried to spark confusion among enemy ranks, and then cause panic; if this approach was successful, they would move to attack. But if the Romans maintained their discipline, the Slavs executed a mock retreat. This was deliberate and was supposed to lure their opponents into another trap.¹³⁴ The subject of pursuit has already been

130 Shlosser, *The Reign of the Emperor Maurikios*, 102–107. Schlosser puts forward a thesis about the significance of spoils in *Strategikon*, though the author of the treatise devoted relatively little space to the subject. But the importance of loot for the army in the times of emperor Maurice is a different thing entirely. The *Eclogue* even outright states that although leaders receive sufficient pay, regular soldiers should have theirs supplemented with captured treasure. It was divided so that one sixth of the spoils went to the imperial treasury, the rest was for the troops. A commander could receive a reward for the battle, provided he distinguished himself in the field, but this was granted by the *strategos* from the part intended for the imperial coffers, so it did not diminish the amount that the rank-and-file would get. Soldiers were given an equal share of the spoils, regardless of whether they were actually fighting or spent the battle in camp. *Ecloga*, 18.

131 Sym. 6. 7–8.

132 *Ecloga*, 16. 2. See also McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, 321; Dain, "Sur le « peculium castrense », " 253–257; Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 106–107.

133 In the past, the same was done by the Gauls, and even Romans. See: Frontinus, 2. 13. 1; 13. 2.

134 Strat. 11. 4.

discussed here, so let us just remind ourselves that Roman soldiers were always eager to chase after a retreating enemy, which often resulted in disruption of the tactical formation. The running barbarians would additionally compound the confusion and chaos by dropping valuables in the path of the pursuers. When the Romans stopped to pick up these precious items – which would invariably lead to disorder, since there was not enough for everybody – the Slavs returned to the battlefield and assaulted the disorganized formation.¹³⁵ Battle devolved into a series of duels and individual clashes without a clear tactical order. In this situation, the Slavs had a real chance to defeat the usually tactically superior Romans.

Bearing in mind the efficacy of the mechanisms, the Roman army implemented them in the Middle Byzantine period, using the same tactics against its enemies. As the author of *Sylloge Tacticorum* noted, in the course of setting up a trap, the retreating Roman unit (tasked with luring the enemy into an ambush) could abandon some equipment, especially if parts of the arms and armor were made of silver. Some enemies were sure to stop and collect the valuable objects, some would keep chasing the Romans, certain now that the flight was authentic since equipment was being discarded. As a result, the enemy formation was further disrupted, leading to chaos.¹³⁶ An example of this stratagem (but targeted against the Romans) was seen in 950, when the sultan of the Hamdanids¹³⁷ managed to flee from an ambush laid by Leo Phokas. Sayf al-Dawla is said to have saved his life only because he spilled gold coins during his flight, successfully stopping the pursuit.¹³⁸

The above example encapsulates why it was crucial for the soldiers to maintain discipline during distribution of spoils. Someone looting the bodies of the fallen is not interested in fighting – meaning that he has been effectively eliminated from the battle. Only a just and certain division of spoils ensured that the soldiers would fight rather than loot enemy bodies. This was one of the reasons why Nikephoros Ouranos ordered that spoils be distributed fairly among all units, including those that did not take part in fighting, but guarded the camp or the wagon train.¹³⁹ In the 6th century, the author of *Strategikon* put it very bluntly in the section of the treatise devoted to military law:

135 Różycki, “Fear – elements of Slavic ‘Psychological Warfare,’” 23–29.

136 *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 24. 5.

137 The importance of this event and the methods employed by Leo Phokas for the development of overall Byzantine tactics in the 10th century was highlighted by: Cheynet, “Les Phocas,” 305.

138 Leo Diaconus, 2. 5.

139 Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, 63. 10.

Despoiling the dead, attacking enemy supply trains or the enemy camp before the battle has ended is extremely dangerous and may result in tragedy. Soldiers should be warned beforehand that, as specified in the military code, they must not engage in such behavior. Too often it has been the reason for an army that practically won the battle to become defeated in the end, or even destroyed completely.¹⁴⁰

The author categorically stated that any looting before the battle has been resolved was strictly forbidden. Soldiers focused on collecting valuables lose track of the battle around them, which leads to chaos and, possibly, defeat. Human greed combined with jealousy and conformity could have tragic consequences. The Romans tried to resolve this issue in various ways. First of all, the provisions of Roman military law mentioned by the author of *Strategikon* were very strict in their treatment of looters. The inevitability and severity of punishment was to deter anyone from exhibiting such negative behavior on the battlefield. The particular provision dealing with despoiling the bodies of dead enemies was recorded by the author of *Strategikon* and by Ruffus.¹⁴¹

Once the army has formed a battle line, or during combat, any soldier that leaves his position or his unit and flees, or attacks without a clear order, breaking formation, or loots bodies, or pursues the enemy without a clear order, or attacks the enemy camp or supply train, shall be put to death. All items collected by him shall be confiscated and deposited into the common treasury of the tagma, since he broke formation and by doing so betrayed his brothers-in-arms.¹⁴²

The punishment, then, was of the most severe kind, and the threat of it was to keep soldiers from going against the military code. What is more, men were aware of this, because the provisions of military law were communicated to them from time to time by their superiors.¹⁴³ But it is difficult to determine if the rule was followed, or if it was rather a dead letter. Nevertheless, soldiers going into battle had to be certain that they would not miss out on any spoils as long as they maintained formation and discipline. In the end, treasure captured

140 Strat. 7A. 14.

141 Ruffus, *Leges Militares*. Hereinafter referred to as Ruffus. References are for the edition authored by Clarence Eugene Brand in: Brand, *Roman Military Law*.

142 Strat. 1.8. 16. Item twenty-five of *Leges Militares* is consistent with item sixteen of military law included in *Strategikon*. Ruffus, 25.

143 Strat. 1. 6.

from the enemy was a motivational factor and, in theory at least, one of the few such factors that could encourage men to risk their lives in open battle.

An important function on the battlefield was given to the *depotatoi*,¹⁴⁴ responsible for evacuating wounded soldiers, searching through the bodies of fallen enemies and collecting spoils.¹⁴⁵ A specific number of *depotatoi*, usually 8–10 men,¹⁴⁶ was assigned to each *bandon* (βάνδον)¹⁴⁷ of Roman cavalry.¹⁴⁸ They were to follow the unit, serving as support. Soldiers of this formation had their mounts equipped with special stirrups (two on the left side), which were supposed to facilitate evacuation of the injured, and with a supply of water for their comrades exhausted from the fighting. The responsibilities of the *depotatoi* regarding medical aid were quite similar to the role of contemporary military medics, although they do not seem to have had any special training. For each rescued soldier, the *depotatoi* received a reward in the form of one nomisma over their regular pay. This was to encourage them to better fulfill their duties on the battlefield and take the risks necessary to save their comrades.

The tasks carried out by *depotatoi* are immensely difficult to track in narrative sources, just like the whole theatrical aspect of post-battle events, in which the lead role was played by the primary commander of the victorious force. As we have already mentioned, after winning the battle, the soldiers' stress levels dropped and they expected rewards for performing their duty well. What happened after combat was not often described, so let us analyze the few accounts that are available. Once again, Theophylact Simocatta's narrative about the Battle of Solachon turns out to be exceptional. Following the false alarm and after calming the men who were afraid of a renewed assault by the Persians, *strategos* Philippicus gathered his victorious force in formation and began rewarding individual soldiers according to their achievements or injuries sustained.¹⁴⁹ Simocatta noted the following:

Next day the *strategos* made a review of the army. He gave gifts to the wounded and gold and silver trinkets as payment for bravery, awarded

144 Strat. 2. 9. See also, on the development of this formation, in: Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World*, 246. See also instructions about collecting spoils in *Praecepta militaria*, 4. 14.

145 Spoils were then given to the *archon* leading the unit.

146 The author of *Strategikon* stressed that *depotatoi* should be selected from among those less skilled in warfare. This way, the first line of fighters was not weakened and men ill-suited for *mêlée* combat could still serve a purpose on the battlefield. Strat. 2. 9.

147 The basic tactical unit on the battlefield, its name derived from the word for "banner". *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, 250.

148 A Roman cavalry *bandon* numbered around 300 men. Pertusi, *Ordinamenti militari*, 671.

149 See also: Aussaresses, *L'armée byzantine*, 104–108.

for having faced danger. For their courage, some received promotions; one, a fine-looking Persian horse, fit for battle; another, a silver helmet and quiver; yet another, a shield, breastplate and a spear. The Romans won as many spoils as the number of men, who fell in battle. At noon, the strategos stopped the review and sent the wounded to nearby cities and strongholds so that they could be treated and could recover from their wounds with the help of Asclepius's subtle art.¹⁵⁰

So, as can be seen, the bravest fighters were rewarded with advancement in the ranks, sometimes Persian mounts,¹⁵¹ valuable helmets, quivers, embellished spears, shields or breastplates. The chronicler remarks that the number of spoils matched the number of the dead on the battlefield, which might suggest that most of the loot came from fallen Persian warriors, who were known for carrying valuables on them. That Philippicus distributed the treasure during an official ceremony, before the eyes of the entire army, confirms the validity of the suggestions found in *Strategikon*. Soldiers participating in the battle were constrained by the military code from gathering spoils¹⁵² that task fell to their comrades – the *depotatoi*. However, the events of the Battle of Solachon illustrate that the existence of the *depotatoi* did not always prevent men from looting. The unit that captured the Persian camp was effectively eliminated from the battle when soldiers began plundering enemy tents left virtually unprotected. Order was restored only after Philippicus's decisive intervention.¹⁵³

According to the military treatises, the commander, which in this case was Philippicus, the overall leader of the army, could begin the distribution of spoils only once the battle had been resolved.¹⁵⁴ This celebration of victory could have been a standard Roman post-combat procedure in the period in question. The valuables looted from the enemy should be divided among the troops,¹⁵⁵ and a public ceremony would have had a positive impact on morale of soldiers who, let us not forget, would be exhausted, apathetic and depressed by the loss of their comrades. Doing this in front of the whole army, assembled

150 Sym. 2. 6. 10–13.

151 Simocatta gave much praise to Persian horses, which not only looked good but also behaved excellently in combat.

152 Despoiling the dead enemies while in battle was punishable by death, and the possessions of the culprit were confiscated. Strat. 1. 8. 16.

153 Sym. 2. 4. 1–5.

154 *Sylloge Tacticorum* also contains information that during this ceremony not only individual soldiers but entire units should be honored. *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 50. 3.

155 Theophylact states that not every soldier received the same spoils. *Sylloge Tacticorum* contains the author's advice to distribute the spoils evenly among all the soldiers, both fighting and non-fighting ones. *Sylloge Tacticorum*, 50. 4.

in formation, emphasized the scale of success and reinforced the idea that soldiers could expect rewards for their struggles. The author of *Strategikon* illustrates his in-depth understanding of the issue, by stating:

In times of peace, fear and punishments are what keeps soldiers in line, but during a campaign, granting rewards will bring better results.¹⁵⁶

Soldiers in combat practically scrambled for the attention of their leader,¹⁵⁷ which would allow them to prove themselves in his eyes. So, on the one hand, the presence of the commander inspired confidence, and on the other hand – zeal. Performing well in battle could be noticed and, in consequence, a soldier could count on more valuable spoils or gifts (in *Strategikon* the word is literally δῶρον) or even a promotion. After all, Theophylact noted that the *strategos* awarded treasure according to one's achievements during the fight.¹⁵⁸ In the 10th century, Constantine VII¹⁵⁹ advised subsequent rulers to take a reserve of gold to any campaign, to be used as gifts and rewards for the fighting men.¹⁶⁰ In his speech to the soldiers, Constantine emphasized that their deeds during the campaign would not go unnoticed because the ruler received written reports on anything that happened.¹⁶¹ The fact that the leader personally distributed the spoils also had a symbolic significance in the minds of the soldiers.¹⁶² Those that exhibited great courage in combat would be rewarded, so, with some luck, any soldier could expect to achieve this honor. The commander also benefited from this ceremony. For example, after taking New Carthage,

¹⁵⁶ Strat. 8B. 27.

¹⁵⁷ The Romans wrote their names on the shields so they could be identified by unit leaders standing further away. Veg. 2. 18. See also one of the best examples of what we have discussed here: *Bellum Iudaicum*, 5. 3. 12–16. This and other cases have been analyzed in: Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army*, 270.

¹⁵⁸ Sym. 2. 6. 11.

¹⁵⁹ Of course, the emperor did not author the work, but commissioned it. See Haldon, *Three treatises on imperial military expeditions*, 66–68.

¹⁶⁰ *Constantini Porphyrogeniti tres tractatus de expeditionibus militaribus imperatoris*, (C) 261–266. The list of individuals rewarded by the emperor was obviously longer. For example, we learn that the emperor's bodyguards received such gifts every week. The underlying idea was to ensure the loyalty of the units charged with the emperor's personal safety. See also Chatzelis, *Byzantine Military Manuals*, 105–106.

¹⁶¹ *Military Oration of the Emperor Constantine*, 5.

¹⁶² The importance of this fact for morale and the army's devotion to its leader was also noted in: Lee, "Morale and the Roman Experience of Battle," 206. The author emphasized that rewards were generally given out by the emperor in order to secure the soldiers' loyalty. Examples from the 6th century indicate that in Late Antiquity this trend was reversed, since the emperor was rarely present during military campaigns.

Scipio himself rewarded the boldest legionnaires, and in the year 70, Titus Flavius ordered that a list of those who distinguished themselves in combat be read out loud. The just distribution of plunder guaranteed high morale and satisfaction among the men, and granting gifts personally to the bravest ones reinforced the leader's authority, which at a time of military rebellions¹⁶³ was also an important aspect of the whole process.

In the afternoon of the same day that the gift-giving ceremony was held, Philippicus concluded his review of the army, dispatched the wounded to border forts, while he himself, together with those troops fit for combat, moved deeper into Persian territory.¹⁶⁴ The treatment of the injured was a psychological ploy as well. If they were well cared-for, it was a message to the soldiers that in the event of an injury they would not be left to suffer a slow death, but rather be treated by professional medics in one of the frontier forts. With this knowledge, men could be more willing to risk their lives, confident that the risk will pay off in possible rewards, and any sustained injuries will be treated with proper Christian care. The author of *Strategikon*, in the section devoted to military maxims, advised the following:

The wounded should be treated with particular care. If we neglect them, we will soon find that our remaining soldiers deliberately do not perform well in combat, and so our error will lead to loss of lives that might otherwise have been saved.¹⁶⁵

Obviously, soldiers will be more eager to fight, risking their health and their lives, if they know that when wounded they will receive proper medical care.¹⁶⁶

163 For example, military unrest in the Balkans in the period in question was described in: Kaegi, *Byzantine military unrest*, 89–120.

164 Sym. 2. 6. 10–13. In the whole passage there is no mention of prisoners. Most likely the passage describing the situation after Stephen's arrival to the camp referred not only to the prisoners that his forces captured after dispatching the surrounded enemy, but to all prisoners that have surrendered since the start of the battle, see: Sym. 2. 5. 3. Theophanes the Confessor suggests that the *strategos* personally led the detachment that escorted the prisoners and the wounded to Roman territory. Theophanes also specified the number of prisoners at two thousand, whereas Simocatta wrote about over one thousand. Teofanes Confessor, AM 6078.

165 Strat. 8B. 43.

166 See a fascinating text about the modern outlook on military medicine (especially surgery) and compassion in the army: Bähr Noak, "Emotions, Imagination and Surgery: Wounded Warriors in the Work of Ambroise Paré and Johan van Beverwijck," in *Battlefield Emotions 1500–1800 Practices, Experience, Imagination*, ed. Erika Kuijpers and Cornelis van der Haven (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 71–91.

Even in Roman times, the injured (τραυματίας) were given special treatment, as evidenced by the existing system of Roman military hospitals¹⁶⁷ and military healthcare,¹⁶⁸ institutionalized since the times of the Empire. A legionnaire suffering an injury in battle, or suffering from any type of illness, would be aware that he would be cared for by the state, which, personified by the commander, would make every effort to improve his lot. This was important for keeping army spirits high. Legionnaires were ready to take risks, confident in the professional medical care they would be provided if anything bad should happen. It is very likely that this aspect (i.e. deliberately influencing the behavior of the troops), and not concern for the soldiers' health, was the root cause for the establishment of the military hospital system.¹⁶⁹

In the times when *Strategikon* was written, those leaders who did not care for the sick and the wounded had to deal with loss of morale and a markedly more guarded and defensive attitude amongst their subordinates. Nobody will put their life on the line if possible injuries are not treated by professionals, which could even result in death. In the end, a healthcare system was a necessity to keep the army in fighting condition and to maintain high morale among soldiers. Although we have no information about any military hospitals functioning in the 6th century,¹⁷⁰ from Theophylact's account we may conclude that at least in some frontier forts there were doctors who would treat the wounded.¹⁷¹

167 On the subject of Roman military hospitals, see more in: Ludwika Press, "Valetudinaria w rzymskich fortach," *Novensia* 4 (1992): 7–29; Ludwika Press, "Valetudinarium at Novae and other Roman Danubian Hospitals," *Archeologia* 39 (1998): 69–89; Ido Israelowich, *Patients and Healers in the High Roman Empire* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 87–110; Ernst Künzl, *Aesculapius im Valetudinarium – oder warum die bisherige Interpretation der römischen Lazarette weiter gilt* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005).

168 For more on Roman medical care in the army, see: Patricia Baker, *Medical Care for the Roman Army on the Rhine, Danube and British Frontiers in the First, Second and Early Third Centuries AD* (Newcastle: British Archaeological Reports, 2000); John Scarborough, "Roman medicine and the legions: a reconsideration," *Medical History* 12/3 (1968): 254–261.

169 We should add here that the sight of injured comrades can be more discouraging to the troops than seeing their dead bodies. Holmes, *Acts of War*, 180–182. There was another important problem related to convalescents. Now, we know that wounded people tend to avoid the thing that harmed them. In an army, it means that soldiers going back to military service could avoid fighting for fear of harm. See a case study of the fear of receiving subsequent wounds: Mimmie Willebrand, et al. "Injury-related fear-avoidance, neuroticism and burn-specific health," *Burns* 32 (2006): 408–415. Unfortunately, ancient sources do not provide any insight into whether this factor posed real problems.

170 Neither in narrative sources, nor in archaeological ones.

171 Sym. 2. 6. 12–13. Possibly some medical services were transferred to complexes located next to churches in fortified border positions, like for example the *ptochotrofium* in

Field medics had yet another responsibility; once the second line of troops (i.e. *defensores*) has marched through an area, they were to collect any discarded equipment and inspect enemy bodies in search of valuables. Later, any spoils would go to the *archons* leading ten-man squads¹⁷² – the *decarchs* (δεκάρχης), who after the battle distributed it among the whole *bandon*. So, anything of value would go into the common treasury, which would be divided once the fighting was done. Since the *depotatoi* followed their own *bandon*, they only gathered gear and valuables won by their unit, which would prevent rivalry between the medics of different units. Soldiers were also aware that everything collected by their *depotatoi* went into a single pot, which would eliminate the issue of individual soldiers competing for more spoils. From the notes in *Leges Militares* we also know that if someone wanted to claim a valuable piece of gear or some other treasure¹⁷³ for himself, he could expect severe punishment, and his loot would still be added to the common pile. This stimulated internal social control mechanisms in the unit, which was obviously very desirable for the superior officers, since it helped manage the unit and introduced an additional, informal level of oversight. If all spoils were considered to be shared goods, then anyone who took something only for themselves would

Novae, where a large number of military finds were discovered. On the subject of military finds from Novae and their relation to the local bishopric, see: Andrzej B. Biernacki and Łukasz Różycki. “Early byzantine arms and weapons from episcopal complex in Novae,” in *Proceedings of the First International Roman and Late Antique Thrace Conference*, ed. Lyudmil Vagalinski, Milena Raycheva, Dilyana Boteva and Nicolay Sharankov (Sofia: National Institute of Archaeology with Museum, 2018), 453–466; Andrzej B. Biernacki, “Early Byzantine Iron Helmets from Novae (the Diocese of Thrace),” in *Byzantine Small Finds in Archaeological Contexts*, ed. Alessandra Ricci and Beate Böhlendorf-Arslan (Istanbul: Ege Yayınları, 2012), 91–104. For more on the functions of the *ptochotrofium*, where helmets were found, see: Ewaryst Kowalczyk, “The charitable activity in (the) Ancient Christianity,” in *Europa und seine Regionen: 2000 Jahre Rechtsgeschichte*, ed. Karl H.L. Welker and Andreas Bauer (Köln: Böhlau Köln, 2007), 63; Andrzej B. Biernacki, “The Episcopal Complex in Novae (5th and 6th Cent. A. D.),” in *Biskupstwo w Novae (Moesia Secunda) IV–VI w. Historia – Architektura – Życie codzienne vol. 1*, ed. Andrzej B. Biernacki and Rafał Czerner (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2013), 31–39.

172 A ten-man unit of soldiers is a δεκάρχία, the basic organizational unit in the Roman army, in status corresponding to the earlier *contubernium*.

173 Persians deliberately carried valuables, to cause chaos among enemy ranks, at least according to the author of *Strategikon*. Strat. II. 1. Persian aristocrats went into combat wearing good-quality gear, suitably decorated to emphasize their status. In the times of Maurice, the Persian cavalry was mostly made up of *degans*, who rose to prominence at the end of the 5th or in the beginning of the 6th century, mostly after the Mazdakite revolution, which allowed Kavād I to weaken the upper echelons of the Persian aristocracy and strengthen the position of the local aristocracy – the *degans*. Compare: Touraj Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia. The rise and fall of an Empire* (New York: Tauris, 2009), 54–55.

automatically be seen as stealing from the whole group of his brothers-in-arms. Thanks to the internal control mechanism, soldiers themselves monitored the behavior of their peers and stopped them from looting during combat, as this was in the best interest of the unit as a whole. And for the commanders this was an excellent way to control their formation in battle; it guaranteed that soldiers would not break ranks in search of spoils, since they knew that every item of value would be collected in the end.

With regard to the social control system we should also point out that soldiers belong to an artificially-created group, highly hierarchical. Its behaviors and functioning are based on clearly stated rules and legal norms. Despite this, the social control system in the army has always existed on several levels. Soldiers, as a group, come up with their own norms of behavior, even their own language,¹⁷⁴ which are not set out in law. These usually refer to everyday relations between men of the same military rank. As is typical for a closed group, rules regarding looting would also have been established. Before strict Roman military law even had to be applied, soldiers would be able to solve any problematic situations, usually still during the battle, among themselves. If despoiling bodies is not acceptable in a unit, since it automatically means a tangible loss for the remaining soldiers, then, thanks to group pressure, any undesirable behavior (in this case, looting) would be eliminated, without the need to resort to external control mechanisms (meaning military law). This was the primary level of social control in a unit, informally reinforced by collective punishments.¹⁷⁵ The second level was external control, imposed by officers in the form of military law, which was necessary when the internal social control system failed.

This mechanism of internal control, supplemented with the threat of external control (mainly punishments), was a superb method of reinforcing discipline in a group of soldiers without having to resort to the commander's authority. This allowed the Roman army to solve numerous problems, such as the issue of looting bodies during battle. Thanks to the introduction of the *depotatoi*, soldiers were focused on fighting, rather than on valuables dropped by the enemy.¹⁷⁶

174 Every professional army has its own jargon, difficult for civilians to understand. For example, see a study on the modern vocabulary of the US Army: Alan Axelrod, *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot: The Real Language of the Modern American Military* (New York: Skyhorse, 2013).

175 See also the part of this book dedicated to social control from the point of view of military law.

176 Strat. 2. 9. This double role of medics was also noted in: Aussaresses, *L'armée byzantine*, 26.

6 Indecisive Battle

In the event of an indecisive clash, Roman forces would normally return to their marching camp, which despite numerous changes in the Late Roman army, lost none of its significance.¹⁷⁷ Behind its palisade, in familiar surroundings, the legionnaires could regroup. The familiar area of the camp would have been enough to have a psychological impact. It was a safe harbor and a familiar place, a refuge of sorts, or even their *patria alterna*. Even if the walls were makeshift, they provided a feeling of security, which under the circumstances was more important than actual quality of the fortifications. The significance of setting up marching camps for the soldiers' mental health was even greater during campaigns on enemy territory, as it gave the men a familiar element in the otherwise foreign lands.¹⁷⁸ In this situation, the tents behind the camp wall became true home.¹⁷⁹

If no side managed to gain complete control over the battlefield, there was a real risk that the engagement would be continued the next day. In this case, the Romans could retreat to a provisional camp set up between the field of battle and the main camp that held the army wagon train.¹⁸⁰ As has already been discussed when describing post-battle events, the soldiers' morale in this situation was low, and it took a truly extreme stimulus for them to once again go into battle. But if there was no other option, the author of *Strategikon* suggested a simple trick to lower enemy morale and raise the spirits of Roman soldiers:

Our own fallen should be buried together, secretly, at night, whereas the enemy dead should be left on the field, so that our adversaries lose their courage.¹⁸¹

This was terrorizing the enemy in the modern sense of the word. Terror defined as acute fear, usually inspired deliberately, which paralyzes the individual experiencing it, and is often related to uncertainty of survival.¹⁸² The bodies scattered around the battlefield were to evoke precisely this paralyzing feeling

177 Syrianus, 29; Strat. 12B. 22.

178 As already mentioned, a man in an extreme situation is most likely to focus on a well-known and familiar reality. Kilpatrick, "Problems of Perception in Extreme Situations," 20–22.

179 Titus Livius, *Ab Urbe condita*, 2. 40. 7.

180 Strat. 5. 4.

181 Strat. 8A. 16.

182 Pieter, *Strach i odwaga*, 100–103.

in the enemy.¹⁸³ The sight of their dead comrades, who had fought in the same clash, caused fear in those who survived.¹⁸⁴ However, a canny commander could reforge this fear into anger, which, as we have already learned, was very desirable on the battlefield. So, this stratagem was an effective, double-edged weapon. Its effectiveness was further increased by the lack of Roman bodies. Obviously, their opponents could suspect that the Roman dead had been collected from the field, but seeing only their own fallen would still be disheartening. It would also raise questions about the scale of actual Roman losses, if they were able to clear the battlefield and bury their dead overnight. Additionally, Roman soldiers were kept in the dark about how many of their comrades had died in combat. The bodies were buried at night, in a communal grave, away from anyone's eyes. With the possibility of another battle looming overhead, this would make sense, although it was at odds with the previously analyzed suggestions regarding the burial of soldiers. The sight of fallen brothers-in-arms, often horribly mutilated, could lower morale and unnecessarily remind men about their mortality.¹⁸⁵ But if the stratagem found in *Strategikon* was employed, instead of their own dead, legionnaires would see a field filled with the bodies of defeated enemies. A horrifying sight, for sure, but also one that evoked satisfaction from a soldier's job well done, and inspired confidence before the next fight.

The stress before a battle could make soldiers flee even before it began,¹⁸⁶ but in terms of morale, the most destructive period was the one following a defeat. In this situation, it was difficult to raise the soldiers' spirits and the realization that some of their comrades had died and the enemy was still nearby could lead to overall panic. The author of *Strategikon* understood that this could result in the destruction of the entire army, even if the defeat was only partial, and advised how to counteract the spreading fear. If the army was still in good order and there was still a possibility of victory, he suggested the following:

183 We should also consider the religious consequences of similar actions. Compare: Polyaeus, 1. 28.

184 This was done by Titus Didius, who ordered that only the fallen Romans be buried. The next day, when the Spaniards saw only their own dead on the field, they concluded the battle had been lost and surrendered to the Roman general. Frontinus, 2. 10. 1.

185 A similar thing was done by Agesialos, who commanded his troops to hide the bodies of those who fell on the first day of fighting. This disheartened the Boeots, who came to believe that in that initial clash significantly fewer Spartans had died than their own soldiers. Polyaeus, 2. 23.

186 Panic and contagion of fear have been discussed already.

An army defeated in open battle should not be pampered and should not hide behind fortified walls, even if this seems a good idea; while their fear is still fresh they should attack once more, which will allow them to re-engage with more confidence.¹⁸⁷

This is a bold statement which could possibly have been corroborated by the author's own experience in the field. After a defeat, men would be depressed, which could easily turn into apathy, numbing them to external stimuli. Finding a way out of that situation would be no easy task.¹⁸⁸ In the fragment above, the author of the treatise advised against retreating (literally, "finding refuge" – *καταφεύγω*) to the safety offered by fortifications¹⁸⁹ and against treating soldiers with leniency, as this could exacerbate fear of the enemy and paralyze any attempts at taking further action.¹⁹⁰ Instead, the soldiers should be promptly broken out of their stupor and made to attack once again, but only if their morale was not completely crushed.¹⁹¹ In essence, the author of *Strategikon* suggested getting back in the saddle before the prospect of facing the opponent and their own fear became too much for the troops to bear. Such an attempt would be risky, but lack of any action could have even more dire consequences.¹⁹² Both the decision whether this advice should be followed, and how to go about it, required from the person in charge extensive knowledge about human psychology and an ability to sense the attitudes of his subordinates. The commander, being himself under the influence of various stress factors, had to calmly assess the morale of his troops and if risking another confrontation with the enemy was worth it. Only once all the pros and cons had been weighed could an informed decision be made.

Every experienced army leader was aware of the risks of re-engaging the enemy the next day after a battle. Despite there being certain simple tricks that could be used to increase the chances of victory, the general rule was to avoid confrontation after a defeat or an indecisive clash. The mental exhaustion, the casualties, the injuries, increased stress, apathy, and uncertainty about one's

187 Strat. 8A. 43.

188 Compare the description of Ammianus after the defeat of Roman cavalry clashing with the Persians. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 18. 8. 12–15.

189 On safe locations, see: Jan Mieszkowski, "Fear of a Safe Place," in *Fear Across the Disciplines*, ed. Jan Plamper and Benjamin Lazier (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 35–51.

190 *Naumachiai*, 10. 2. A similar suggestion regarding defeat in a naval battle was given by Syrianus, albeit without any explanation.

191 Strat. 8B. 11. 18–23.

192 Doliński, Nawart, "Fear-then-relief procedure for producing compliance," 27–51.

future and the leader's abilities (after all, he did not defeat the enemy on the first day, so why would he be successful on day two or three) – all these factors decreased the chances of victory in the renewed battle.¹⁹³ In the end, battles that lasted days without any reinforcements appearing would invariably break the morale of the fighters and result in retreat.¹⁹⁴ This is what happened in one of the most famous battles of Late Antiquity fought by the Roman army at the river Yarmuk.¹⁹⁵ The engagement lasted for five days, during which the morale of the Roman force gradually dropped. On the final day, 20th August 636, the Arabs struck the death blow by launching an attack at their broken opponents, which led to overall panic and the destruction of the Roman army.

7 Defeat

Victory could, at the most, result in loosening of discipline, which may have required certain actions from the commander, and the risk to the army was present, but negligible. But in the case of defeat, the army leader had to make use of all of his skills in order to prevent a complete disaster. A soldier bested in battle, if he survived, was subject to very intense and continuous stress factors. First and foremost, all the same post-battle effects that have already been described would have come into play – tension would let up as the body, exhausted with the stress and the physical exertion, demanded rest. These were physiological reactions, beyond the control of individuals – or, even less so, their commander. The difference was in morale and confidence in one's abilities. Defeat made people question their faith in their training and their skills; the faith that was built up throughout their whole time in the army.¹⁹⁶ It was the same with confidence in the skills of a commander who had just been defeated. The Romans were repeatedly reminded that they were the best army in the known world;¹⁹⁷ each failure could shatter this conviction, making

193 Strat. 8B. 11. 1–15.

194 A factor omitted in military treatises, which is nevertheless present on every field of battle, is the smell. The aftermath of a clash can be sensed even before it is seen, especially since the stench is not only from the decaying bodies but even the bodies of those freshly dead. Holmes, *Acts of War*, 177–178.

195 See, e.g. the popular science work: David Nicolle, *Yarmuk 636 A.D.: The Muslim Conquest of Syria* (London: Osprey Publishing, 1994), 65–84.

196 Contemporary research into defeat in Antiquity has been summed up in an excellent piece by Brian Turner and Jessica H. Clark, "Thinking about Military Defeat in Ancient Mediterranean Society," in *Brill's Companion to Military Defeat in Ancient Mediterranean Society*, ed. Jessica H. Clark and Brian Turner (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 3–24.

197 Veg. 1. 1.

the soldiers useless. Added to that, the image of the barbarians was shaped to be entirely negative, based on a simple opposition: the civilized Romans versus the barbarians. After a defeat, the Roman soldiers would have had to flee before these same people who, in their eyes, did not even deserve to be called civilized. Exposed to this severe stress, during the retreat soldiers either panicked or resorted to following familiar patterns. In any case, a man confronted by extreme circumstances has a tendency to isolate himself from events happening around him and to act irrationally.¹⁹⁸

The Roman worldview was very helpful before a battle, affecting the attitude and motivation of the soldiers, but in the event of defeat it made it more difficult to restore order among the ranks. The morale of individual legionnaires would be further impacted by the losses suffered by the army, particularly at the level of the unit. Soldiers would spend years, sometimes their entire service, living within a single *bandon* of about 200–300 men, functioning day in day out as part of an even smaller *contubernium*, i.e. a group sharing a single tent.¹⁹⁹ Relations in any given tent were almost family-like, and friendship among the men was additionally reinforced²⁰⁰ by army leaders as an important element of the military ethos that encouraged men to fight and improved morale.²⁰¹ Each loss or a serious injury suffered in combat by someone from the *bandon*, especially from a given *contubernium*, must have been hard on all of the surviving members. Solidarity and cohesion in a Roman military unit was built

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- 198 Kilpatrick, "Problems of Perception in Extreme Situations," 20–22. These observations were first presented in academic terms in: Hadley Cantril, *The Psychology of Social Movement* (New Brunswick – London: Transaction Publishers, 1941). It is worth remembering that extreme situations lead to tunnel vision, which in turn limits perception.
- 199 Thomas Fischer, *Die Armee der Caesaren. Archäologie und Geschichte* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2012), 261. Relations in such a community are very well described in: Łuc, *Boni et Mali Milites Romani*, 108–136.
- 200 At this point, it is impossible not to mention the stimulated homosexuality in some Greek units in classical times (e.g. Thebes, Elis, and perhaps Megara). This was done in order to strengthen the bonds between soldiers and thus influence their combat ability. Plutarch stated that loving couples fight better because they protect those they love, and they are ashamed to show fear on the battlefield in front of their lovers. On the other hand, homosexuals in combat were also supposed to lead to problems, because they often sought out danger and opportunities to distinguish themselves before their partners, and any instance of breaking tactical discipline was extremely risky when two battle lines were clashing. Plutarchus, *Moralia* 761c. See more in: Daniel Ogden, "Homosexuality and Warfare In Ancient Greece," in *Battle in Antiquity*, ed. Alan B. Lloyd (London: Classical Press of Wales, 1996), 107–168.
- 201 Many professional soldiers, when asked what they were fighting for, would answer that it was "for the man standing next to them". This is a desirable motivating factor, known as early as in the ancient times. Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army*, 252–257. For a later period, see Berkovich, *Motivation in War*, 128–164.

starting at the most basic level; in literature, soldiers were often represented as *contubernales* (tent mates) or *commilitones* (fellow soldiers). This feeling of brotherhood within a unit was to make men more willing to risk their lives in defence of their friends.²⁰² This is a very strong emotional bond; in this situation, a soldier puts his good before that of the group, and in extreme situations is more willing to make sacrifices.²⁰³ Like in the previously quoted example of the Frank who charged at the Seljuks during a retreat, or the two Armenian infantrymen who defended a bridge.²⁰⁴ Theophylact Simocatta mentions an extremely interesting story of a soldier named Sapeir who, during a siege of Beïudaes in 587,²⁰⁵ heroically climbed the battlements of the besieged Persian stronghold. All the time, the soldier was encouraged by his brothers in arms who watched his progress and, when he was thrown down from the wall for the first time, hurried to help him. After a second fall, the brave Sapeir kept fighting, finally climbed to the top of the battlements, cut off a defender's head and threw it as a trophy to his comrades. According to Simocatta, this boosted the morale of the besieging troops.²⁰⁶ As a result, the stronghold surrendered and a portion of the Persian garrison was executed. This example not only illustrates true heroism in the face of the enemy, but also the motivating power of the mere presence of a soldier's brothers in arms, and the fact that they are watching the struggle and appreciating one's bravery.

How strong the bonds forged between individual soldiers were is also confirmed by how they referred to themselves in private correspondence. To emphasize the closeness of the relationship, military men in their letters often called their comrades brothers (*frater/ἀδελφός*).²⁰⁷ Looking at the letters of legionnaires from previous periods, what emerges is an image of a functioning military community based not only on joint service within a small unit, but on the job performed as well. An excellent illustration of this is the letter by

202 Lee, "Morale and the Roman Experience of Battle," 209; Holmes, *Firing Line*, 300; McGurk, Castro, "Courage in Combat," 181.

203 Halim Ozkaptan, Robert S. Fiero and Crosbie E. Saint. *Conquering Fear – Development of Courage in Soldiers and Other High Risk Occupations* (Washington: Lulu, 2010).

204 Matthew of Edessa, 2. 28.

205 Identification of contemporary Fafa, approx. 15 km to the east of Ömerli – see Louis Dillemann, *Haute Mésopotamie orientale et pays adjacents* (Paris: Geuthner, 1962), 230. More on the siege also in Leif Inge Ree Petersen, *Siege Warfare and Military Organization in the Successor States (400–800 A.D.)* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 276.

206 Sym. 2. 18.

207 This was noted, among others, by Michael Alexander Speidel. See more in: Michael Speidel, "Soldiers and Documents: Insights from Nubia. The Significance of Written Documents in Roman Soldiers' Everyday Lives," in *Literacy in ancient everyday life*, ed. Anne Kolb (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 179–200.

a military trumpeter (*bucinator*) named Licinius, stationed in Coptus, to his counterpart Caesius serving in Primis.²⁰⁸ In the short letter Licinius mentions a trumpet from Alexandria, which was the subject of a discussion between the two soldiers. The interesting thing in the context of this study is that the letter contains names of two other trumpeters (Niger and Eros), and the author sends wishes of good health and warm regards to all *bucinatores* (ἀσπράζου σὺ δὴ [κ]αὶ πάντες τοὺς σαλπιστάς),²⁰⁹ which attests to a certain level of professional familiarity. This means that the network of relations between soldiers could have been more extensive than we recognize, built on a brotherhood of arms, as well as the more focused military specialization. In the context of the military ethos, reinforcing professional pride and improving morale, such relations would have been cultivated and likely occurred also in the period analyzed here. One more factor that played a role in strengthening these bonds between military men was shame. A warrior going into battle often overcame his fear not because of his leader's encouragement, but because he would have been ashamed to let his comrades down. The approval (τιμὴ) of peers was a highly motivating factor, contrary to the feeling of shame that resulted from failure to meet the expectations of one's brothers-in-arms.²¹⁰

When an army, whose fighting spirit was built up so carefully on several planes, was defeated, we must consider yet another crucial aspect. The Roman army was steeped in religious rituals²¹¹ which convinced the troops that they had divine favor on their side.²¹² In the face of defeat, this religious faith was also heavily tested. Losing, especially to pagans, meant that the army or its commander had lost the goodwill of Heaven.

The authors of treatises from Late Antiquity tried to come up with various ways of restoring morale in a defeated army. The first and most pressing issue to deal with was the vicinity of the opposing army. Even if the Romans found safety behind the walls of their camp, their only prospects were continuing the battle on the next day or a fighting retreat. Vegetius, whose work's

208 "Three Lists of Soldiers on Papyrus Found in Qasr Ibrim," 47–57.

209 "Three Lists of Soldiers on Papyrus Found in Qasr Ibrim," verses 20–22.

210 van Wees, *Greek Warfare. Myths and Realities*, 163.

211 Before leaving the camp the army was supposed to say the prayer *Kyrie elejson*. Strat. 2. 18. Religious motifs were also present during the clash itself, e.g. battle cries referring to the Christian faith. It was the same in the times of the Olympian deities. Onasander advised observing religious rites without any hidden goal or subtext. A good commander was supposed to care for the physical as well as spiritual health of his men and also seek the gods' favor. Onasander, 5.

212 Issues of religion in the Roman army are extensively described in: Lee, *War in late Antiquity*, 176–205.

entire premise is a call to return to classic Roman warfare,²¹³ interestingly does not mention fortified camps when writing about defeat. What is more, in his opinion the army should not retreat from a battlefield, and if it suffered a loss – should prepare a counterstrike. Vegetius presented his reasoning in the following manner:

If the whole army has been routed, it may seem that nothing will save us from complete disaster. But even then fate may often smile upon us and we should strive to prevent an evil outcome. A prudent commander should never risk open battle if he has not previously taken the necessary precautions that in the event of a loss will allow them to rescue the defeated army from total destruction. He should consider the fickle nature of fortune in battle and the possibility of a mistake, which may happen to anyone. Sometimes all it takes to save an entire army is to have a hill at your back, or a fresh unit in reserve behind your lines, or a group of bold men, who despite the army crumbling around them will keep fighting on. It often happens that an already defeated force rallies, and promptly dispatches the scattered and unsupported pursuers. Disaster most often strikes at an army intoxicated with temporary victory, because it is then that fear most swiftly grabs hold of the prideful and the bold. In any case, regardless of the scope of our loss, we must send for those that are still holding ground and with fiery words persuade them to grab their arms and get back into the fight. Once again take stock of our line and our reserves and, most importantly, exploit every opportunity to surprise and strike out against the enemy, so that with renewed courage we might turn things around. Opportunities will be many, since nothing stirs up vanity in men so much, nothing makes them so blind to danger – as success. In other words, let those who think that their final hour is upon them recall the course of all other battles, in which at first all seemed to be going in the enemy's favor, and which in the end resulted in our resounding victory.²¹⁴

Vegetius did not even entertain thoughts of retreat,²¹⁵ even less of Roman defeat. His work contains little information on how to treat the soldiers after a loss. Moreover, even if the Roman army had been defeated – Vegetius advised to re-engage the enemy as soon as possible. Analyzing these suggestions we may

213 Veg. 1. intr.

214 Veg. 3. 25.

215 Compare this fragment to the work of Onasander: Onasander, 36. 3–6.

be excused for thinking they were irrational. Everything we know about human psychology indicates that after a defeat no soldier would be willing to continue the fight, risking his life that had just been saved. However, all the authors of Antiquity wrote similar things about a victorious force; soldiers would be tired, susceptible to panic, overextended in pursuit, focused on looting bodies, etc. Vegetius suggested to act on this in the event of defeat, provided that the entire Roman army had not yet panicked. Their opponents would be affected by the same forces and stress factors that the Romans had to deal with after a victory, and this could have a practical application. The most crucial part belonged to the commander. First of all, the field of battle should be selected so that a retreating army could find shelter.²¹⁶ Vegetius suggested a hill – again, it should be emphasized that he said nothing about the army camp. Once the army had rallied, or after finding a unit that stubbornly kept fighting, the author advised reviewing one's forces and making a speech that would inspire the soldiers to re-engage. It is difficult to assess the causative power of speeches as described by authors of military treatises.²¹⁷ The issue of motivating soldiers with words has already been analyzed here, we simply need to remember that Vegetius's suggestions in this matter were far from practical. But assuming that a commander was able to move his subordinates, that his fiery speech raised morale and made the army march into combat once again, they would definitely be facing a less-than-prepared enemy. This is where Vegetius saw the hope for turning the tide of battle back into Roman favor, clearly highlighting that many victorious armies were defeated during pursuit. However, the reasoning expressed by Vegetius was purely theoretical. Normally, once the Romans had actually broken from combat, it would be difficult to expect them to just turn around and defeat the forces they were retreating from. Once an army started fleeing, there was almost no stopping it, especially with the enemy pressing behind. Although the advice given by Vegetius has some rationale behind it, it once again uncovers the author's lack of field experience. Had Vegetius ever been in a battle, he would have known that his suggestion was only applicable if the enemy did not pursue them, and allowed the Romans time to reform their forces. This rarely happened.

The suggestions on dealing with defeat found in *De Re Militari* illustrate, on the one hand, the author's intriguing analysis of human behavior, as it is a

216 Łukasz Różycki, "How to choose the best field of battle – according to the authors of Roman military treatises," in *War in History. The History of Polish and General Military Science*, ed. Andrzej Niewiński (Lublin: Napoleon v, 2017), 23–39.

217 Hansen, "The Battle Exhortation," 161–180; Goldsworthy, *The Roman Army*, 146–147. See also: Immacolata Eramo, "Retorica militare fra tradizione protrettica e pensiero strategic," *Talia Dixit* 5 (2010): 25–44.

partial reversal of his stance on what to do after a victory. On the other hand – in a way that was typical of him, Vegetius completely disregards uncomfortable facts.²¹⁸ Counterattacking against a pursuing enemy was only possible if the initial retreat was only staged, and this maneuver required ironclad discipline and mental resilience. A broken, fleeing army is entirely given over to panic compounded by conformity and caused by the fear of death and the atavistic desire to run away from danger.²¹⁹ It is true that a victorious force loses some of the things that made it strong in the first place; and the condition that Vegetius so beautifully described: *nothing stirs up vanity in men so much, nothing makes them so blind to danger – as success*,²²⁰ does in fact occur, as we have already discussed in the section on victory.²²¹ But in order to exploit this fact you needed something more than simply a rousing speech to a scattering of demoralized soldiers.

A completely opposite view was presented in *Strategikon*; where a large portion of Book VII is devoted to how to handle defeat. This is yet another instance where comparing the work of Vegetius or Syrianus Magister against the anonymous author from the times of emperor Maurice shows the latter as significantly superior.

The author of *Strategikon* wrote thus, illustrating his in-depth understanding of human psychology:

If the enemy is victorious on the first day of the engagement, we believe that it is entirely pointless and ill-advised to try and make the same force defeated in the field attack once more on the next day or in the near future. We urge every strategos to not even consider this course of action. Any soldier would find such an order hard to follow. It is not the custom of any people to rush back into battle after being defeated, with the exception of the Scythians, and to the Romans this attitude is completely alien. Even if the strategos is aware of the mistakes he made and hopes to redeem himself in the second battle, his soldiers will not understand the

218 It is possible this was due to the author's lack of experience, since he was never in the army and, even more so, never had the opportunity to lead men in victory or defeat. Only if he had, could his suggestions be considered practical. But, knowing that his work was mostly a compilation, we should assume that at least a part of the fragment in question was copied from or inspired by another work from Antiquity.

219 In the literature on the subject, authors even use the term "contagion of fear" when referring to a mob in which individual awareness is dulled.

220 Veg. 3. 25.

221 Look at the example of the Carthaginians, who after a victorious battle allowed themselves to be beaten twice by Titus Marcius, who rallied the remnants of the Roman force. Frontinus, 2. 10. 2.

reasons for sending them against the enemy once more. They will rather see the outcome of the first engagement as a sign of divine will and lose all their fervor.²²²

An army could rejoin the battle only if its morale was not completely broken and its forces not completely scattered.²²³ Ideally, the author of the treatise suggested leaving defensive units in reserve. These would not be demoralized by the defeat and could be employed in battle on the following day. Additionally, their ranks could be bolstered by men from the broken formations, who should be mixed in with the *defensores*.

However, if the soldiers' mental condition indicated they would be unable to continue fighting, the idea should be abandoned. Obviously, every commander would want to redeem himself, especially if he knew what had gone wrong and caused him to lose the clash. But, the disheartened legionnaires would not understand why they should get back in the field, being already defeated and exhausted physically and mentally. This is a curious interplay between the psychology of the individual and the attitude of a group – i.e. social psychology. The army leader wants to fight, to rid himself of the stigma of defeat and humiliation. This should be understood on several levels. There was the personal pride of a professional soldier,²²⁴ who had been bested in open battle, meaning that he had been shown to be inferior in skill. Desire for revenge would have been a natural reaction of an ambitious, aggressive individual, and these were the traits expected of a Roman leader of men.²²⁵ A very fresh look at the issue of military careers in Late Antiquity and early Byzantine times was recently presented by David Alan Parnell. Although the author focused mainly on Justinian's reign, it should be noted that his work points to very interesting research directions, especially in terms of identifying relations between soldiers and their superiors. This latest attempt to reconstruct the links between the army, soldiers and their commanders and the surrounding world shows

222 Strat. 7B. 11. 1–13.

223 And even then the author of the treatise advised regrouping and mixing the soldiers of the first line with those of the second line – defensive troops, serving as reserves and a protective screen, who did not actively participate in the defeat. See: Strat. 8B. 11. 18–23.

224 Considering the ancient understanding of the term, the Roman army did not have a professional leadership cadre, which has been covered in the introduction to this work.

225 Analyzing military treatises, it is not entirely clear what features an ideal Roman leader should possess. Very often, guidelines from treatises are mutually exclusive with military maxims, which has already been demonstrated many times in this book. One thing is certain – in Late Antiquity, great commanders from the times of the Republic were still considered the model; interestingly, the Romans showed as much respect to their own heroes, as to their adversaries from times past, e.g. Hannibal. See: Syrianus, 3; Strat. 8B. 77.

how much remains to be done with regard to this subject.²²⁶ Also, there would have been a political aspect; military commanders rarely intended to serve their entire life in the army, it was to be a springboard to an administrative or political career. Although in the times of the Roman Republic and early empire a loss in the field did not yet spell doom for the political career of a defeated leader,²²⁷ in Late Antiquity it was no longer so, according to the maxim:

If most of the army is destroyed in battle, the commander is to blame.²²⁸

The emperor demanded results, and if a *strategos* did not deliver them, he could be quickly replaced.²²⁹ There were even humiliating cases when a replaced commander remained in the army as a subordinate of the new person in charge. This happened, for example to Comentiolus, who lost the title of *magister militum per Orientem* to Narses. Despite the demotion, Comentiolus remained in the army as one of the higher-ranking commanders.²³⁰ All these factors, both mental and personal, caused Roman leaders to want to continue the fight, counting on victory. Or unable to admit defeat. See, for example, the

²²⁶ For more context on the soldiers' careers, see: Parnell, *Justinian's Men*, particularly 77–130.

²²⁷ See the primary work on the subject: Nathan S. Rosenstein, *Imperatores Victi: Military Defeat and Aristocratic Competition in the Middle and Late Republic* (Oxford: University of California Press, 1990). According to Rosenstein, Romans did not blame their leaders for defeats; the blame was usually put on the soldiers or divine will. This was supposedly due to the almost mythical perception of Roman aristocracy, from whose ranks came practically all the commanders of the Republic and early Empire. With a more modern approach, the subject was studied in: John Rich, "Roman attitudes to defeat in battle under the Republic," in *Vae Victis! Perdedores en el mundo antiguo*, ed. Francisco Pina Polo, José Remesal Rodríguez and Francisco Marco Simón (Barcelona: Publicacions i Edicions de la Universitat de Barcelona, 2012), 83–112, where the author reviewed the sources used in Rosenstein's work, especially the statistical methodology that he employed. A separate issue is the status of defeated commanders in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages, which to date has not been comprehensively researched.

²²⁸ Strat. 8B. 45.

²²⁹ Consider the career of John Mystacon, who in 583 was recalled from the East due to lack of results, in 587 took command of Roman armies in Thrace, replacing Castos, who was captured by the Avars, and after 589 he was back holding the function of *magister militum* in Armenia. *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* III, 680. A commander could also be removed from command if he was being too successful and his popularity became a threat to the emperor's position. This is the only reason that could explain Justinian's dismissal of Belisarius in the West.

²³⁰ For more context on promotions and demotions, see also: Schlossler, *The Reign of the Emperor Maurikios*, 113. The example of Narses is often given when discussing the position of the army leader's second-in-command in Late Antiquity. Schmitt, "Die Bucellarii," 156–157.

death of Charietton, who continued to fight the barbarians even after his soldiers had already fled.²³¹ The soldiers would have been on the other end of the spectrum. One should not expect such an army to put up a determined fight in the second clash, but rather to flee at mere sight of the opposing force. An over-ambitious commander could lead to disaster, even if the second time he would be able to counter the causes of his initial defeat, because an army unwilling to fight would be easily routed by the enemy. So, a leader bent on continuing the engagement was risking the fate of his entire force in the name of personal glory. The author of *Strategikon* warned against such possibility, emphasizing that defeated soldiers were unfit for further battle and a *strategos* should look for other ways of rebuilding his strength. The mental condition of the broken army was the crucial factor.

Notably, in the same paragraph the author of the treatise also counters the opinion expressed by Vegetius, stating that it was not the Roman way to return to the fight after losing the first time, and more so – that no people other than the Scythians, meaning the nomads in general,²³² were known to do so.

Another significant aspect was religion, which in our analysis of the 6th century and Late Antiquity has already appeared a number of times. Soldiers believed that by fighting barbarians, especially pagans and heretics, they were doing God's work.²³³ Numerous military rituals were related to the Christian religion,²³⁴ such as prayers before combat, participation of priests in military campaigns, or carrying around religious symbols for all to see, were to convince the men that they were under divine protection.²³⁵ These were very often bottom-up activities, instigated, however, by the commanders.²³⁶ The procedure was so popular that in the 10th century individuals who did not take part in the rituals risked harsh punishment.²³⁷ An individual caught missing a holy

231 Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum gestarum*, 27. 1. 5.

232 On the subject of Roman ethnography and the *topoi* that appeared in it in the analyzed period, see: Kaldellis, *Ethnography After Antiquity*, 1–26.

233 Lee, *War in late Antiquity*, 176–205.

234 Thanks to Onasander's narrative we know that belief in Greek armies was similarly exploited. Suitable religious rituals were supposed to motivate the soldiers and convince them the gods are on their side. Onasander 5.

235 This was particularly popular in the Middle Byzantine period. See for example the author of *Praecepta militaria* who advised the commanders to fast before battle. *Praecepta militaria*, 5. 6. 3.

236 Religion has always been present in armies, and very frequently used by commanders to dispel fear and give the soldiers confidence. Berkovich, "Fear, Honour and Emotional Control," 103–104.

237 On prayers: *Praecepta militaria*, 4. 11; Nikephoros Ouranos, *Taktika*, 61. 11. About punishment: *Praecepta militaria*, 5. 6. 2.

mass could expect demotion and corporal punishment, followed by having his head shaved as a sign of disgrace. Religion played an important motivating role, emphasized by army leaders, at the same time effectively dispelling the soldiers' fears by instilling in them a sense of divine providence. As already mentioned, in the event of defeat, this belief was questioned. Although sources remain quiet on the subject, we can imagine at least two possibilities. People faced with an extreme situation function according to a specific pattern. First and foremost, they seek consolation and relief from stress, which religion might help with; otherwise, they try to rationalize the situation²³⁸ that they found themselves in, which might lead to a crisis of faith. In the first instance, which is mentioned by the author of *Strategikon*,²³⁹ faith is so strong that even a dramatic event like losing a battle is not enough to shake its foundations. Soldiers would explain the defeat of the army that was under God's protection in two ways – either it was the will of God, or God's favor had been lost, usually because of the sinful behavior of men, which offended the Almighty. In the other case, faith itself would be questioned; it is the most drastic possibility, but we cannot disregard it. Whatever the result, army morale would suffer.

Defeat in battle did not leave many options. The commander could only order retreat, all the while harassing the enemy with ambushes and traps, and if necessary – a fighting retreat could be called for.²⁴⁰ Before going into battle, soldiers were supposed to be equipped with rations for several days²⁴¹ and the *strategos* was supposed to organize provisions for fortified marching camps set up along the expected route of retreat.²⁴²

Syrianus Magister rather cautiously suggested to prepare for a loss even before the battle had begun.²⁴³ This was related to a clever ploy that he described. The commander was to keep a detachment of cavalry in the back lines, well hidden from enemy eyes. If the battle was not going their way, the Roman leader ordered a retreat using sound signals and banners.²⁴⁴ At the sight of their own forces retreating or fleeing, the hidden cavalry unit went into action. The riders were not enough to change the outcome of the clash, they

238 Compare to this shocking report: Bruno Bettelheim, "Individual and mass behavior in extreme situations," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 37 (1943): 417–452, here especially 428–429.

239 Strat. 7B. 11. The situation was similar after a victory. According to the author of the treatise the tactical order of the winning army depended first on divine will, and second on the commander himself. Strat. 7B. 12.

240 Strat. 7B. 11.

241 Strat. 7A. 10. Tied to saddles or kept in saddlebags.

242 Strat. 7A. 7.

243 Syrianus, 38.

244 Syrianus, 38.

were to have a purely psychological effect. The cavalry unit should appear far enough away that the opponents would not be able to accurately assess their numbers. As a result, the pursuit had to slow down – the enemy had to take precautions in the event Roman reinforcements joined the fight. The attacking Romans in essence stopped the pursuit for as long it took the opponents to reorganize their formation and resume their pursuit in good order, ready to repel the countercharge. The enemy advance would be additionally slowed down by the fear of engaging unexpected Roman reinforcements. The soldier's attitude after a victory has been discussed already – as we have learned, a victorious army was susceptible to any change to the existing tactical situation. The appearance of fresh forces on the battlefield was one such change. With some luck, the mere sight of Roman cavalry could potentially halt the pursuit in its tracks entirely and cause panic in the army that won the clash. Syrianus evidently knew how an army behaves after a victory and used this knowledge to make it easier for Romans to retreat. The actions suggested by Syrianus would mostly only have a psychological impact. The mounted unit was to frighten the opposition into slowing down or abandoning the chase completely. This small detachment would have made a marginal difference in the actual fight but, used correctly after the battle, gave the Romans time to disengage from the enemy, which could save the whole army. Syrianus further notes that the retreating force should throw down caltrops in their wake,²⁴⁵ which effectively discouraged anyone from advancing at a fast pace.²⁴⁶ The fear of encountering these area-denial traps caused the army that followed to focus on observing the ground rather than continuing the pursuit.²⁴⁷

The author of *Strategikon* wrote extensively about patterns of retreat that could be employed in different situations. In all cases the dominant factor was the morale of the troops, which determined if the commander would have any possibility of carrying out tactical maneuvers, or if the army will simply run for their lives. The primary thing to do was for the lower-ranking officers, who had better rapport with their subordinates, to manage the morale of the retreating

245 Often referred to as medieval mines. Their impact on the battlefield was often tremendous, and the Romans employed them eagerly. See: Mamuka Tsursumia, "TRIBOLOS a Byzantine landmine," *Byzantion* 82 (2012): 415–422.

246 Caltrops were very popular over the centuries. Thanks to an anonymous source from the time of Emperor Basil II, we know that they would be scattered in front of the camp, fastened on a rope. This way, each unit created a twenty-metre wide field, densely covered with the traps. Each soldier had a special line to which eight caltrops were attached, and the unit also had an iron rod to which these lines would be attached. So, in the morning, when breaking camp, it took only a moment to collect all the caltrops. *Byzantini liber De Re Militari*, 2. 17–30.

247 Syrianus, 38. 21–27.

force. Even before leaving the battlefield they were to speak to the men in an attempt to inspire anger, that would replace apathy. The *strategos* should exemplify courage in the face of the dangers following a defeat.²⁴⁸ This was an act for the benefit of the demoralized troops, consistent with the saying:

An army is perceived through the character of its commander.²⁴⁹

And, with the following military maxim:

The attitude of the leader subconsciously spreads to his soldiers; there is an ancient saying that it is better to have an army of deer led by a lion, than an army of lions led by a deer.²⁵⁰

This way, the defeated army was to be reassured that their leader had lost none of his tenacity (here expressed as φρόνημα). We can imagine what the sight of a despairing commander would do to army morale. It would compound the apathy and the feeling of helplessness in soldiers and in consequence could lead to a disorganized flight. What is more – a downhearted leader would encourage the enemy to keep up the pressure in order to completely destroy all Roman forces. And we should remember that spying on the opposing side was not unusual in this period.²⁵¹ Infiltrators could provide fairly reliable information, sometimes eyewitness accounts, about e.g. the mental condition of the defeated army's leader. So, even if the *strategos* was crushed by the loss, to the eyes of his soldiers and enemy spies he had to appear confident, reinforcing the belief that this was merely an accidental and minor setback.

If the army was withdrawing from a force of mainly infantry, the maneuver should be executed swiftly, preferably on horseback.²⁵² The army should maintain an appearance of good order. This was likely to discourage the opposing force from moving to destroy the Romans completely and, on the other hand – it would improve the morale of the losing side through the immediate return to normal military behavior. Performing familiar tasks could, in this case, prevent panic. Maintaining tactical order was of paramount importance, since any disorder within the ranks could turn an organized retreat into a chaotic

248 Strat. 7B. 11.

249 Strat. 8B. 93.

250 Strat. 8B. 79.

251 The issues of infiltration and of countering spies were given a surprising amount of attention in *Strategikon*. See: Strat. 1. 4; 1. 9 and especially 2. 11; 7A. 3. Notably, this subject was also touched upon by Vegetius, as well as Syrianus Magister.

252 Strat. 7B. 11.

rou. A good example is the event that occurred during a night march of the Roman army to the staging ground against the Avars. Panic was caused by the confusion related to a beast of burden. According to Theophylact, one animal was carrying its load askew. This was noticed by a soldier walking behind, who called out to the animal's handler to turn around and fix the straps securing the baggage. The call was taken up by the entire army, and the march turned into a panicked retreat in the dark.²⁵³

When the army was attempting to withdraw from a mostly mounted force, the situation became more difficult.²⁵⁴ First and foremost, staying in an organized formation would have been all the more important. In the case of smaller units, cavalry could easily break them and proceed to murder or enslave all Roman soldiers. Being pursued by a mounted force while disorganized resulted in heavy losses, which could even lead to total annihilation of an army.²⁵⁵ To prevent this from happening, the author of *Strategikon* advised that the whole retreating force should dismount. They should also discard all heavy materials that would make the withdrawal difficult; the same would be done with slower moving animals.²⁵⁶ Only a number of small units were to remain mounted;²⁵⁷ these were likely tasked with scouting and harassing the enemy.²⁵⁸ The whole army should move on foot, in two rectangle-shaped battle formations able to

253 In the words of Simocatta: Sym. 2. 15. 9–10. παρηχείται γὰρ τοῖς πολλοῖς ἡ φωνή, καὶ παράσημον ἦν τὸ λεγόμενον, καὶ φυγὴν ἐδόκει δηλοῦν, ὡς οἶα τῶν πολεμίων ἐπιφανέντων ἀθρόον αὐτοῖς καὶ παρακληψάντων τὴν δόκησιν. μεγίστου δὲ συμπεσόντος τῷ στρατεύματι θρύλου, θροῦς παρ' αὐτῶν πολὺς ἐπανάσταται, παλιννοστεῖν τε ἐβόα πᾶς γεγωνῶς διαπρύσιον, ἐπιχωρίῳ τε γλώττῃ εἰς τοῦπίσω τραπέσθαι ἄλλος ἄλλῳ προσέταττεν, „τόρνα, τόρνα” μετὰ μεγίστου ταράχου φθεγγόμενοι, οἶα νυκτομαχίας τινὸς ἐνδημούσης ἀδοκίμως αὐτοῖς. διασπᾶται γοῦν ἅπαν τὸ σύνταγμα ὡσπερ ἀρμονίας τινὸς τῶν ἐν τῇ λύρᾳ νευρῶν. *A great uproar rose among the army, an outstanding noise among the men; a loud voice was calling all to turn back, men shouted to one another in the local language, urging to retreat in this great confusion: “torna, torna,” as if an unexpected night engagement was upon them. The whole army wavered akin to the strings of a lyre.* The event was widely covered in literature due to the character of the shout and its language, see e.g.: Năsturel, “Torna, torna, fratre,” 179–188; Baldwin, “Torna, torna, phrater,” 264–268.

254 Strat. 7B. 11.

255 The Athenian Myronides supposedly used this fact to reinforce the morale of his army before a clash. In his address to the troops he stated that the valley that was to be their battlefield was perfectly suited for cavalry, which the enemy had more of (so, in the event of a retreat things would have ended catastrophically for his men). Thanks to this trick, the Athenians held their ground against the enemy's mounted warriors and maintained their position. Polyaeus, 1. 35. 2.

256 Strat. 7B. 11.

257 Strat. 7B. 11.

258 This is conjecture, as the author of the treatise only specifies the need to dispatch the mounted unit, not informing the reader of its tasks.

repel an enemy attack. Only a withdrawal executed in a tight, battle-ready formation gave hope for escaping the nomads or the Persians.²⁵⁹ Nevertheless, it would have been difficult and we should assume that it took place with the pursuers constantly reminding the Romans of their presence. Similarly to a battle fought over the course of several days, morale would have gradually fallen due to the continuous stress, which could potentially have led to panic and the destruction of the entire retreating army. The Romans had already had a similar experience during the late republican period in a battle against the Parthians. At Carrhae, the enemy followed the withdrawing legions of Crassus, unable to seriously threaten the main force.²⁶⁰ But, by exerting mental pressure on the legionnaires, the Parthians caused panic, which they then capitalized upon and mounted a classic pursuit, following the disorganized and fleeing Roman force.

The above examples from military treatises demonstrate the importance of keeping the spirits high in a retreating army. The commander could not allow himself a moment of weakness, and immediately after a defeat he had to organize an efficient withdrawal, or a fighting retreat if necessary, to a secure camp or even further.²⁶¹

Syrianus Magister had even more things to say about pre-battle preparation.²⁶² Prior to a clash, the commander should assess the strength of both forces. If the enemy had superior numbers and superior soldiers, and battle was inevitable, Syrianus suggested employing a particular stratagem. The enemy should be stalled so that the actual battle began in the evening.²⁶³ This way, the Romans' potential retreat would start right around sunset, which would prevent the enemy from giving chase. This solved a number of problems. The Romans actually held their ground at first, making themselves look bold and unconcerned, even in the face of overwhelming enemy strength.²⁶⁴ This would have made an impression on the opposing side, weakening their morale. And each passing minute worked in the Romans' favor, making it easier for them to retreat later, if necessary. Delaying the start of the battle meant

259 The fighting methods of these peoples were described extensively by the author of *Strategikon*, who noted their superiority in mounted warfare and provided possible means of countering this advantage. *Strat.* 11. 1; 11. 2.

260 Kurt Regling, "Crassus' Partherkrieg," *Klio* 7 (1907): 359–394; James M. Tucci, *The Battle of Carrhae: the effects of a military disaster on the Roman Empire* (Columbia: University of Missouri-Columbia, 1992); Giusto Traina, *La resa di Roma. Battaglia a Carre, 9 giugno 53 a.C.* (Rome – Bari: Laterza, 2010).

261 *Strat.* 7B. 11.

262 Syrianus, 33.

263 Syrianus, 33. 42–47.

264 Syrianus, 33. 43–44.

the Romans would be withdrawing under the cover of darkness, which would make pursuit impossible, thus preventing heavy casualties.

Following a defeat, the army leader was duty-bound to disengage from the enemy and execute a successful retreat. But the author of *Strategikon* set out two specific situations where a different approach should be taken. The first was the possibility of reinforcements or allies joining in the fight;²⁶⁵ a similar case was described by Vegetius.²⁶⁶ Recent victors were spent both mentally and physically, and after an extended period of being subjected to acute stressors would not wish to fight another battle. So, the winning army could flee at the sight of the new threat. Aware of this fact, the author of *Strategikon* advised his readers that in the event of defeat, if the *strategos* was expecting the quick arrival of a relief force or allied army, the Romans should hold their ground on the battlefield and exploit their opponent's apathy and weakness.²⁶⁷ So, the author not only knew how an army behaved after victory, but knew how to use this to his advantage as well. The goal was to make use of the soldiers' increased vulnerability to external stress factors so as to cause panic and turn the battle around with the help of fresh troops that were unburdened by the emotional toll of failure.

The second instance where an army could choose to hold position after a lost battle was significantly more complicated and described in such detail only by the author of *Strategikon*. He suggested that an army needs not retreat if the opposing side sits down to peace talks or intends to negotiate an armistice. This was a known method of stalling for time. For example, Totila at Busta Gallorum (in the year 552) proposed peace talks to Narses, while in reality he was simply waiting for the arrival of reinforcements.²⁶⁸ Such negotiations should be conducted contradictory. Talks regarding capitulation, or even armistice were considered a sign of weakness and as such could affect morale. The author of the treatise noted that the parley should be done with reasonably quickly, because the longer the army stayed on the battlefield in close proximity to the enemy, the more its morale would suffer.²⁶⁹ To the soldiers, everything around them would be a reminder of the recent defeat, having nothing to do would give them time to turn it over in their heads again and again, and the

265 Strat. 7B. 11.

266 Veg. 3. 25.

267 Strat. 7B. 11.

268 Procopius Caesarensis, *De Bellis*, 8. 31. 24–29.

269 We should remember that the morale of the other side could also be affected. It was this fact that was used by Lucius Sulla, who at one time managed to retreat his army by exploiting the breakdown of morale in the ranks of a stronger enemy force. Frontinus, 1. 5. 17. Reportedly, the same thing was done by Hasdrubal in Spain. Frontinus 1. 5. 19.

closeness of the victorious opponents disheartened them and inspired fear.²⁷⁰ Any bilateral agreement where the Romans agreed to the terms of the winning side, should be concluded with an oath or exchange of hostages. But even if a treaty was signed and sealed with an oath, the author of *Strategikon* suggested to prepare the camp for enemy assault and to expect betrayal.²⁷¹

If the winner's terms were unacceptable, or if the commander decided that the enemy was stalling to keep the Roman army locked in place and with its guard down, the fiasco of peace talks should be spun out so as to improve the morale of one's own forces.²⁷² The author of the treatise advised notifying the soldiers of the breakdown in negotiations, and moreover – to exaggerate the enemy's terms supposedly rejected by the *strategos* and make them public as well. This was another deliberate and conscious manipulation of the soldiers' feelings and attitudes, intended to cause anger. *Strategikon* explains that after disclosing the opponents' overly harsh conditions for an armistice, the Roman soldiers should become infuriated, and that fury should be further stoked by their immediate superiors. An army in such condition could execute the withdrawal much more efficiently, because the soldiers, according to the author of the treatise, would have been more disciplined and more eager to follow orders.²⁷³

Summing up, it should once again be emphasized that, even after a battle, an army was still in danger, which scholars often seem to forget. The threat was present regardless of the outcome of the clash. Contrary to modern academics, the authors of Antiquity knew full well what pitfalls may await an army once the fighting is done. Soldiers began a pursuit or turned to flee in panic, discarding the now-useless weapons that would only slow them down. In each of these possibilities, men were at the brink of exhaustion, both physically and mentally. This was understandable. Adrenaline levels dropped, so the fighters began feeling the weight of their weapons, the noise and stench of the battlefield and the pain of cuts, bruises and wounds sustained in combat. Their mental condition was no better. Fear disappeared in case of victory, or was compounded in case of defeat. Both sides were mentally spent – the fighting and the death of their comrades leading to either the numbness that occurred

270 Men of Antiquity already knew that an inactive army is a recipe for trouble. The author of *Strategikon* even includes a saying in his work that refers precisely to this: *Soldiers must always have something to do, even if the enemy is not attacking. Idleness in an army begets problems.* Strat. 8B. 15.

271 Strat. 8B. 36.

272 Strat. 7B. 11.

273 Strat. 7B. 11.

after a surge of adrenaline, or outright apathy, were not surprising.²⁷⁴ In this situation the commander's role once again came to the forefront. The army leader had to manage the morale of the troops, irrespective of how the battle went, or if they were the pursuers or the pursued.²⁷⁵ The authors of the military treatises of Antiquity knew exactly what dangers a commander would face after a battle. They warned their readers but, more than that, advised them how to exploit the loosening of discipline in enemy ranks for their own benefit, or how to deal with the apathy of Roman forces. All these examples demonstrate that both the authors of the treatises, as well as leaders of Antiquity had a profound knowledge of human psychology. This allows us to more fully reconstruct the events following a military engagement, which usually were not given much attention by ancient historians. In the end, we also need to bear in mind that the actions of Roman commanders, although in line with our understanding of human psyche, were based not on studies, but rather intuition and several generations' worth of observations, which led to the creation of the military treatises.

274 Kilpatrick, "Problems of Perception in Extreme Situations," 22. Such feelings also accompany a person when they are in an extreme situation for an extended period, ultimately leading to depression. If the situation is resolved (meaning, in this case – the fighting stops) it leads to euphoria, which can quickly devolve into an even stronger depression when a new stress factor is introduced (e.g. the enemy returns to the battlefield).

275 Interestingly enough, the more often a man finds himself in an extreme situation, the more confidently he will act, and the less likely he is to submit to stress. This means that the veterans in any army were mentally more stable both during combat, and after its conclusion. Kilpatrick, "Problems of Perception in Extreme Situations," 22.

Conclusion

New methods of study bring a breath of fresh air into historical research. The now-popular combining of different branches of knowledge, or even whole fields of study allows for a novel perception of the past. However, it requires a level of mindfulness on the part of the researcher, both during studies and during the interpretation of findings, particularly if there is a possibility of revisionism or anachronisms.¹ But a properly conducted interdisciplinary study can shed new light on historical works, even those that seem to have already been thoroughly examined and re-examined. Yet, ultimately, even new methods cannot overshadow what is most important in a scholar's work – historical sources. It often happens that a post-modern narrative dominates academic work, relegating the authors of Antiquity to a marginal role and leading to incorrect conclusions.

The process of writing this book began with a broad question: to what extent were men on the battlefields of Antiquity manipulated in a calculated fashion and how significant was this for the outcome of a battle? In the course of our analyses, another question appeared: did Roman commanders deliberately and consciously use the mechanisms described by modern social psychology, or were they simply acting and reacting intuitively? I set this question before a unique type of sources, which in my opinion have not been sufficiently used in similar studies – i.e. military treatises. The works of Roman theoretical military literature are complicated, and some of their content is antiquarian, but with the correct approach they grant an insight into the processes that were beyond the scope of the great works of historiography. The methodology of new military history determined the basic research tools used in this book, but, at least in my opinion, it did not detract from the importance of the actual sources, according to the principles of positivism. Since I have not received education in psychology or psychiatry, I decided not to conduct my own research in these fields, focusing rather on the conclusions reached by prominent scholars in the course of their studies. Following the rule that the priority material for any historian should be the historical source, I attempted not to answer any of the

1 Meaning, the incorrect application of modern context to historical times. In this work there is an increased risk of making this error when comparing the stress factors affecting modern soldiers with those described in the works of ancient authors.

specified questions, but rather let the contents of the analyzed military treatises speak for themselves.²

Studies on the mentality of soldiers of Antiquity and Early Middle Ages are not yet at an advanced stage, and some academics are reluctant to employ the research methods of social psychology and battlefield psychology when analyzing the past. This should come as no surprise, but if we have no other possibility of delving into the psyche of the common soldier on the battlefield, we should be willing to use all the available solutions. The methodology used herein rarely concerns single soldiers, more often focusing on the military community and the processes that govern it. Nevertheless, it still allows us to get a better understanding of the individual on the field of battle as seen through the lens of military literature. However, when conducting research of this sort, we need to be very careful in our analysis of the results. In modern times, we are already able to at least partially describe the mechanisms that determined the behaviors of Roman soldiers. We know that in a communal situation a single man's cowardice can, through conformity, lead to crowd panic, which the Romans learned the hard way many a time. When this happened, one could expect a snowball effect to occur, and soon enough the whole battle line could be running away from the enemy. The desire to survive clouded all others and human instinct took precedence over military training. From the numerous analyzed examples, we have learned that men in similar situations stop thinking rationally,³ and are even ready to throw themselves of a cliff⁴ or into the swift current of a river⁵ in order to escape the immediate threat.

2 Which, I believe, explains the number of direct quotes from sources included throughout the book.

3 A mechanism that has been expertly described by psychologists.

4 Theophylact's description perfectly captures the panic in the camp and its effects: Sym. 2. 9. οὐκ οὖν δειμάτα καὶ φόβοι θόρυβοί τε καὶ ἀπορία τῷ Ῥωμαϊκῷ ἐριπίπτουσιν. καὶ τὸ κακὸν ἀπαρη γόρητον ἦν· ἀσελήνῳ γὰρ νυκτὶ ἐμηκύνετο. οἱ μὲν οὖν διέφευγον καὶ διήνυσον τῶν ἀτραπῶν τὰ δυσέξοδα καὶ μετὰ κινδύνων τὰς ποφοιτήσεις ἐπεποιήντο, καὶ ὁ λόγος τῆς ἀποδράσεως ἦν ἀνεξέταστος· οἱ δὲ βάρβαροι διηπόρουσι τί ἂν παλαμώνται Ῥωμαῖοι, καὶ δυσέφικτος ἦν ἡ κατάληψις. συρρέουσι τοίνυν τὰ πλήθη τῷ μεσίτῃ τῷ φάραγγι καὶ ἐξαισίοις κακοῖς περιβάλλονται, ἐν σκοτομήνῃ τῶν ὑποζυγίων ἐν τῇ τάφρῳ ὡσπερ διολλυμένων τοῖς ὀλισθήμασιν. τῶν δὲ Ῥωμαίων συστρεφομένων τε καὶ ἀνελιττομένων, ὠθοῦντων τε καὶ ὠθουμένων ταῖς ἐριτροπαῖς, λύσιν οὐκ ἦν ἐκείνους εὐρεῖν τοῦ νέχοντος· τοιοῦτό τι κακὸν ἀμαθία στρατηγοῦ ἀπεκύησεν. *As a result, fear, trepidation, confusion and helplessness enveloped the Roman army. The situation spiralled out of control, which was not helped by the lengthening moonless night. Some turned and ran, choosing routes that were difficult to navigate, so that their retreat turned out to be fraught with peril; the reason for their escape incomprehensible. The barbarians looked in astonishment at the behavior of the Romans: it defied reason! The crowd of soldiers then found themselves in a ravine, where other calamities befell them. In the darkness they lost their beasts of burden, as these fell from the slopes of the ravine. The Romans, jam-packed and moving in circles, trampled over one another this way and that, but were unable to break free: this was the disaster that the blinded strategos led to.*

5 As in the already mentioned Battle of Argentoratum.

The way that Roman leaders operated was based on practice and observation of human behavior, which thanks to modern science we can both analyze and categorize. A better understanding of how soldiers behave on the battlefield, possible thanks to advances in social psychology, enables us to explain many phenomena which were previously impossible to study within the context of a historian's methodology. This is the invaluable contribution of new military history.

Ancient commanders were very skilled at using the mechanisms of human behavior for their own benefit and that of the state and emperor. The person in charge was expected to know how to suppress fear in his soldiers before a confrontation. This was done in various ways; starting with the non-combat importance of equipment, which was to terrify the enemy and encourage one's men; lifting the spirits with speeches, which promised rich spoils to anyone; and finally attempts to degrade the enemy leader and the opposing army. Interestingly, we have in fact no information about attempts at generating competitiveness between Roman units in the time in question. Probably, the outcome would have been more harm than good, contributing to a sense of hostility between units, thus damaging tactical discipline on the battlefield. A good example would be the fight that broke out between the elite Batavi cohorts and the legionnaires in 68 AC. Also from the 1st century, we have mentions about competition between the navy and auxiliaries.⁶ There are indications that such behavior was not encouraged in Late Antiquity which does not mean, however, that Roman commanders did not make attempts at manipulation of this sort. In one of his speeches, Constantine VII tried to encourage rivalry between Roman and mercenary troops.⁷

A good Roman general was supposed to be the leading actor in the grand spectacle that took place before each battle, in which his own men but also his opponents were the audience. Apart from manipulating the mood of the soldiers, he had to seem collected and confident, even if nothing was going according to plan. The Roman army was to have unshakeable faith in their commander, while he was supposed to set an example for his men,⁸ work together with them, live a plain soldier's life, and know when to gamble with the lives of his subordinates. The description of an ideal leader given in one of the chapters clearly indicates the number of responsibilities that fell on his shoulders and how much depended on his character. A Roman *strategos* needed to determine

6 *Bellum Iudaicum*, 5. 502–3.

7 *Address of the Emperor Constantine VII to the Strategoi of the East*, 6.

8 Sometimes even shaming their subordinates in the process. A good example would be Xenophon, who went to execute his own order when one of the soldiers began complaining about it. The remaining men, embarrassed, immediately carried out the command. Frontinus, 4. 6. 2.

how his subordinates felt by his attitude alone. Some of the most crucial duties of the commander were to exert control over the army, to understand the importance of morale, and to mentally influence whole units, as well as individual soldiers, so that basic human instincts did not override military training. It should once again be emphasized that these efforts were conscious and deliberate, and calculated to achieve a specific result. Every Roman *strategos* would be expected to possess those skills. It was an essential aspect of warcraft.

Once the army was mentally prepared for battle, once the fear of death was blocked so that soldiers were willing to engage the enemy and their spirits were lifted by encouragement or ruse, it was then the commander's duty to disrupt the enemy's plans, ensuring victory in the coming clash. The first and foremost goal was to strike at enemy morale. To this effect, the Romans used rumors, outright lies, deception, deserters, diplomats and even their own troops who had been taken prisoner. Any method that would give the Romans the upper hand was acceptable. An army leader was duty-bound to make use of a wide array of various stratagems developed throughout the military history of Greece and Rome. Military treatises were supposed to serve as a compendium of this knowledge, both to young commanders who were only just beginning their military career, as well as to experienced *strategoï* looking for more complex solutions.

Once the fighting began, the role of the commander diminished and he became a spectator in a pre-planned spectacle, but he was not completely impotent. He would still have reserves under his command which could be dispatched to a struggling section of the battle line, or his personal retinue, who in case of emergency could intervene on behalf of their leader. Also, even just knowing that the *strategos* was present and observing the struggle could have been a powerful motivator for the soldiers. When one side's morale was finally broken, the leader's role again became significant, since his decisions would determine the fate of the entire army. Following victory, as well as defeat, soldiers would be in a highly vulnerable mental state, becoming more susceptible to external stressors. The commander had to execute a proper pursuit if successful, or rally his forces and motivate them to stage an orderly retreat in the case of a lost engagement. As we have learned in the chapter devoted to events following a battle, both these situations were difficult and required that the leader have extensive knowledge about, and the skills to determine his soldiers' mental condition. A good commander would not only lead the men to victory, but would also fully capitalize on his achievements, seeking to take control of the battlefield while eliminating as much of the enemy's manpower as possible. Forcing the physically and mentally exhausted soldiers to make any further effort was an art unto itself, requiring in depth understanding of

human nature. The contents of military treatises indicate that the Romans were well aware of this, by attempting to prepare their commanders for any situation they might encounter in the field.

Despite the fact that Roman leaders never studied the mechanisms that govern human psychology, which we are familiar with thanks to modern science, they still intuitively made use of them. They did not use the terms “morale” or “conformity” and did not have a definition for these ideas but understood how such factors affect an army in critical situations. As a result, military treatises contain methods of suppressing conformity in a fleeing or wavering army, and methods of inspiring and stoking similar emotions in the opposing force. It was similar with different types of fears, or euphoria before a clash. Roman stratagems were backed by many generations of observations of social behavior in the specific environment of the army. A Roman commander, leading men into combat, at least according to the military treatises, should be familiar with these ruses and make use of them to increase his chances of success in the coming clash. It does not mean that the soldiers’ fear of fighting and dying was completely suppressed, but with proper motivation they should have had an advantage over their opponents.

Even a partial understanding of how Roman soldiers acted in extreme situations brings us closer to capturing at least a fragment of the psychology of ancient peoples. This is made possible thanks to modern research methods which provide exceptional tools to historians, archaeologists and philologists. The study conducted herein is not comprehensive. It is merely another step on the road to understanding the battlefields of Antiquity, the men who fought on them and the sources which are the only surviving testament to ancient wars.

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